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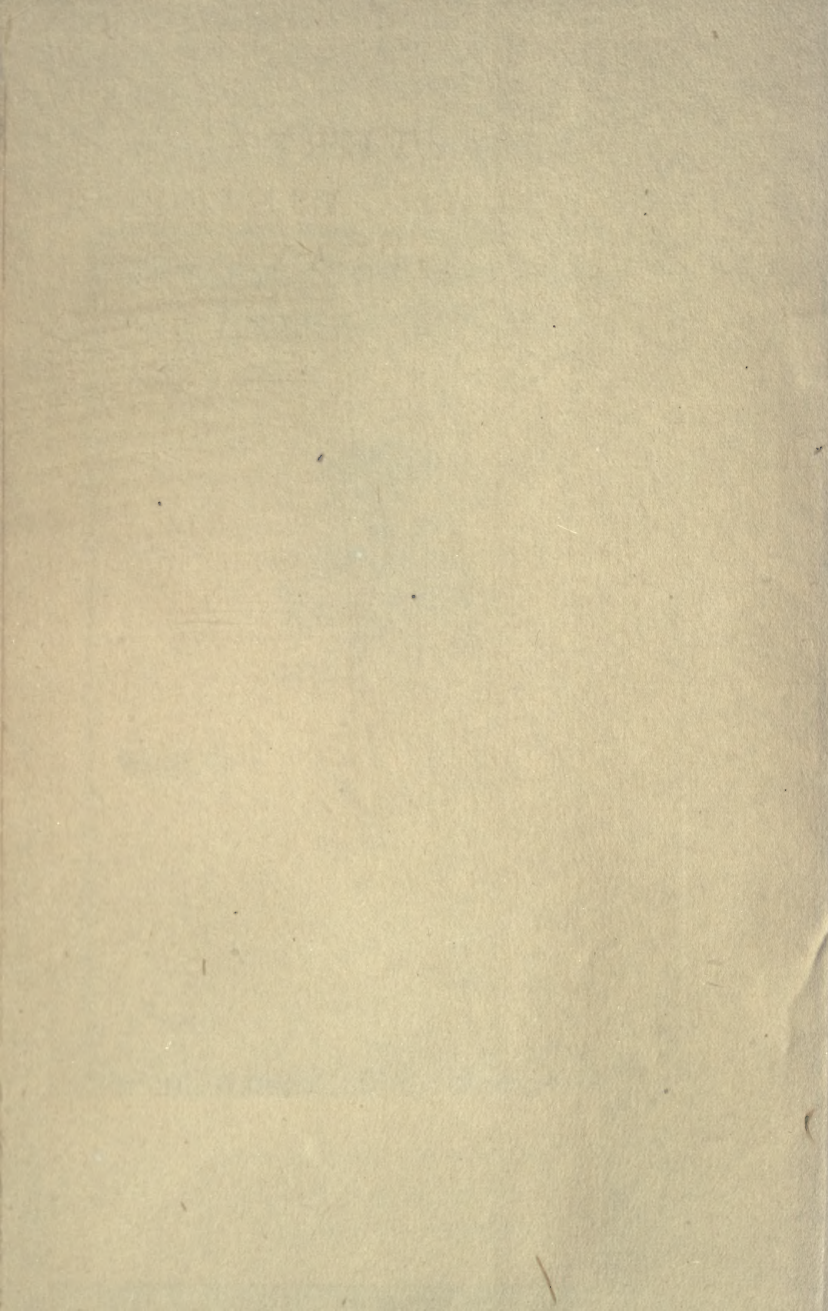
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THE SCARING OFF OF TEDDY
DAWSON.

THREE LANCASHIRE PLAYS

THE GAME
THE NORTHERNERS
ZACK

BY
HAROLD BRIGHOUSE



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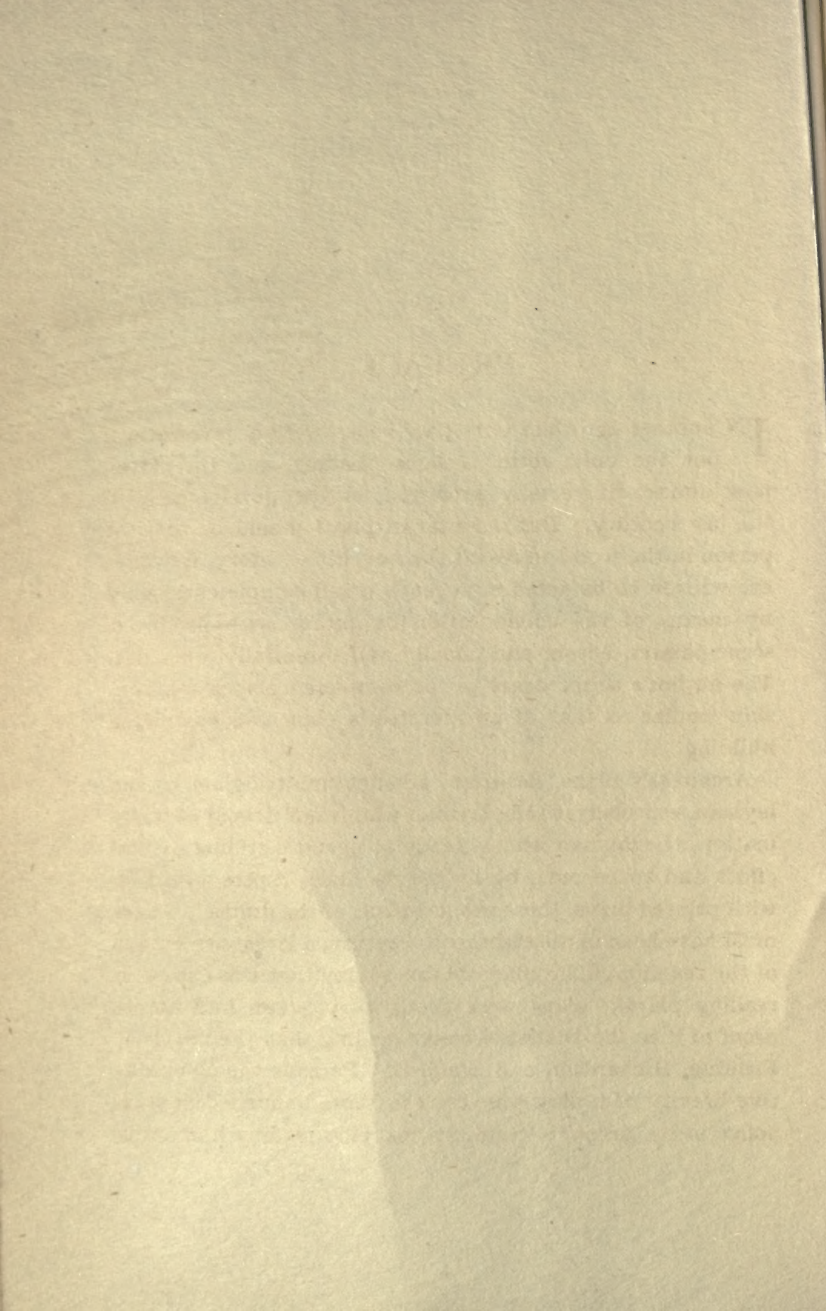
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To
MISS A. E. F. HORNIMAN



PREFACE

IN another age than ours play-books were a favourite, if not the only, form of light reading, and the novel, now almost universally preferred, is the development of the last century. But a writer of plays should be the last person in the world to resent the novelist's victory, for plays are written to be acted, and reach a full completeness only by means of the collaboration of author with producer, scene-painter, actors and, finally and essentially, audience. The author's script bears to the completed play a relationship similar to that of an architect's plan to a completed building.

Architect's plans, however, are not unintelligible to the layman, especially to the layman who is not devoid of imagination, the layman who is ready to spend a trifling mental effort and to become, be it ever so little, expert. And so with printed plays, those ground-plans of the drama. There must have been in the eighteenth century, a larger percentage of the reading public than obtains to-day that was expert in reading plays; plays were thought—you can find ample proof of it in the *Diarists*—easier reading than the novels of Fielding, Richardson and Smollett. Perhaps the comparative brevity of a play was, even in those unhurried days, a point in its favour; certainly the play-reading habit was

strong and one likes to think that it is not lost. To read dully the script of a spectacular play is desolating weariness, but the same script read with sympathetic imagination becomes the key to fairyland, and from an armchair one sees more marvels than ever stagecraft could present. There are abominable limitations on the stage ; producers are tedious pedants ; but the reader mentally producing a play from the book in his hand looks through a magic casement at what he gloriously will instead of through a proscenium arch at the handiwork of a merely human producer. Play-reading, in fact, obeys the law that as a man sows so shall he reap ; a little trouble, rapidly eased by practice, leads one to a great deal of pleasure.

It depends, of course, upon the play as well as upon the reader, and though one has rather romantically instanced spectacular plays, their scripts do, as a rule, belong to the class of play which is not worth reading. They are, or are apt to become, the libretto to some specific scenery or stage effect and the imaginative reader, failing to hit upon the particular staging intended, is lost in puzzlement. Nor do plays of action make the best reading. There are no plays but plays of action, but action is of many kinds, and the play whose first concern is situation and rapid physical movement is so specifically a stage-play, so sketchy in its ground-plan until the collaborators work in unison upon it, as to make reading more of a torment than a pleasure. While you must have wordless pantomime at the basis of every play, it is those plays which exhibit in high degree the use of action in the form of dialogue that are the more comfortable reading ; and, always postulating that a play is a play—not necessarily a playwright's play, the admiration of his brother craftsmen, but a thing practicable,

actable and effective on the stage—the more physical action is subordinated to character, to the exploration of the springs of human motive, the better it is for reading purposes and the better for all purposes.

Ibsen led the modern play, where the modern novel followed it, to the investigation of character rather than to the unfolding of a story, and one suggests that readers who find satisfaction in the modern psychological novel should find the reading of modern plays to their taste for the reason that the dramatists, though they haven't in a play the same opportunities for analysis as the novelists find in their more spacious pages, are essentially "out for" the same thing.

The type of play one is here writing about is one which has not, in the past, flourished extensively in the popular theatres; it is the type known, rather obscurely, as the "Repertory" play. It was called by that name, probably in derision, and the Repertory play was held to be synonymous with the un-commercial play. Then queer things happened. "Hindle Wakes" broke out of the Repertory palisade, made dramatic history and, what from the amazed commercial manager's standpoint was even more startling, a fortune; "The Younger Generation" followed into the commercial camp; and in the rent profiteer's year of 1919, when managers seemed forced by ruthless circumstance more even than by inclination to play the safest game and to offer the Big Public nothing but repetitions of the tried and true, two plays from the Repertories came to town. "The Lost Leader" filled the Court Theatre in a very heat wave, and "Abraham Lincoln" took the King to Hammersmith—with many thousands of his subjects. So that it will not do to speak of plays as commercial on the one hand and Repertory on the other. Repertory has golden possibilities,

if you don't expect too much of it. It would be fallacious to expect the same pay-dust from "Abraham Lincoln" as from "Chu Chin Chow." Nor would one expect Joseph Conrad to sell like Nat Gould.

Sincerity is a virtue possessed, as a rule, by the Repertory play, but it will by no means do to claim for this sort of play a monopoly of sincerity. The most popular type of drama (and the most English), melodrama, is rigidly sincere—to the confounding of the Intellectual. There is plenty of dishonest thinking and unscrupulous play-making, but not in popular melodrama. In melodrama which pretends to be something other than what it is, there is immediate and obvious insincerity, but there is no writing with the tongue in the cheek in downright, unabashed melodramas of the old Adelphi, and the present Lyceum type. It will not do to call the "highbrow" plays sincere, with the implication that all other plays are insincere, any more than they can themselves be sweepingly characterized as uncommercial. Sincerity, anyhow, may be beside the point, and the term Repertory play, though unsatisfactory, stands for something perfectly well understood. No definition would be apt to the whole body of Repertory plays, but one would like, diffidently, to suggest that Repertory plays are written by men and women of intellectual honesty who postulate that their audience will be composed of educated people—and that attempt at a definition fails. It has a snobbish ring.

And now, after generalizing about Repertory plays and reading plays, to come down to the particular instance of the Lancashire plays here printed. They are three of seven plays which their author has written about the people of his native county, and reasons for publishing them now

are that nobody wanted to publish plays during the war, and that the author is an optimist about the future of Repertory. Which last is only a sort of reason for publishing some of Repertory's step-children—that, at any rate, the new men may know, if they care to know, these workaday examples deriving from the only Repertory Theatre in Great Britain which created a local drama. Though none of these three plays was, in fact, produced by Miss Horniman's Company, they nevertheless belong to the "Manchester School," which was a by-product of her Company.

The "Manchester School" was never conscious of itself, as the Irish School was. The Irishmen had a country, a patriotic sentiment, a national mythology; they had, so soon after the beginning that it seemed they had it from the first, the already classical tradition of Synge; they had in the Deidre legend a subject made to their hands, a subject which it appeared every Irishman must tackle in order to pass with honours as an Irish dramatist; and there was explicit endeavour to create an Irish Drama. In Manchester, so far were we from any explicit ambition to create a Lancashire Drama that we denied the fact of its creation. What reputation it had was not home-made in Manchester and exported, but made in London and America. At Miss Horniman's theatre in Manchester, there were so many bigger things being done than the earlier, technically weak plays of the local authors. And it is worth pointing out that the authors went (it was admirable, it was almost original in them) for their material to what was immediately under their noses; they took as models the Lancashire people of their daily life, and in their plays they did not always flatter their models. The models saw themselves in the theatre rather as they were than as they liked to think

they were, and they hadn't the quixotry to praise too highly authors who held up to them a mirror of disconcerting truthfulness. It came upon the authors unexpectedly, as even something a little preposterous, to be taken seriously, to be labelled, heaven knows by whom, the "Manchester School," as if they had a common aim.

That, surely, is the significance of the "Manchester School," that the phenomenon and the hope. Miss Horniman established her Company in Manchester, with Mr. B. Iden Payne, a genius, as her producer of plays. What she gave to Manchester was perhaps more, perhaps not more, than the aftermath of the historic Vedrenne-Barker campaign at the Court Theatre; at any rate, she gave a series of Repertory plays—plays which had no likelihood of being seen in the provinces under the touring system—notably well acted; she demonstrated that drama was a living art, and in the light of that demonstration there outcropped spontaneously, un-self-consciously, the body of local drama now known as the "Manchester School." Whatever the individual merits of the Lancashire plays may be, whatever, even, their collective importance or unimportance, they have this significance of localization. Stimulated by Miss Horniman's catholic repertoire, local authors sought to express in drama local characteristics.

There are no two questions in the writer's mind, nor, he thinks, in anybody's, as to whether local drama is or is not a good thing. It is more than ever good in to-day's special London conditions, but it was always good in and for its own locality, and very good when it broke away from home, travelled to London and introduced to Londoners authentic representations of natives of their country. It brought variety where variety was needed. Not all the

plays of the "Manchester School," of course, have travelled. One or two, indeed, hardly travelled across the Gaiety Theatre footlights, and in the case of a few others, mostly one-act plays, there was never the least chance of their emerging from Lancashire owing to the fact that they were written deliberately in dialect. A most racy little piece, "Complaints," by Mr. Ernest Hutchinson, with its scene laid in the office of an Oldham spinning-mill, is a case in point. One doubts, even, if the comparatively urbane Manchester audience grasped the whole of its idiomatic dialogue. But these are the extremes of local drama, and generally, the Lancashire writers have avoided dialect as, in the first place, impracticable, and in the second place, disused, except (to quote Houghton) "amongst the roughest class in the most out-of-the way districts." Accent is not dialect though possibly originates in it. Even when one wishes to use dialect one must not, for stage purposes, write it as it is spoken. The dramatist selects his material from dialect as he selects his larger material from life. Dramatically correct dialect is literally incorrect; it is highly selected dialogue which indicates, but does not obscure, and the true dialect dramatist is not the man who exactly imitates the speech of a district, but he who most skilfully adapts its rhythms and picks out its salient words. Synge invented an Irish dialect which is false in detail and infinitely true in broad effect, and the "Manchester School," faced with the same difficulty, has solved it in the same way, hoping, though without much confidence, that the Lancashire cadences it adopted and used in its very few dialect plays may sound to alien ears as aptly as the language of Synge's Irish sounds to our own. Though you may search in vain the dialogue of Mr. Allan Monkhouse's plays for local

characteristics, the "Manchester School" has as a rule indicated by the use, in greater or less degree, of local idioms that the speech of Lancashire has a well-marked individuality; but dialect, as a distinctive variant of the national language, can hardly be said to exist in Lancashire.

One labours the point a little in order to make clear that the "Manchester School" had no accidental advantage, over writers who lived near other provincial Repertory Theatres, in the existence of a language whose dramatic literature they felt urged to create; there was no such language. And its absence makes a curiosity of the fact that from Manchester alone of the Repertory centres has any considerable body of local drama emerged. (Dublin is another matter; one speaks here of Great Britain.) Other Repertory centres, like Birmingham and Bristol, must have local characteristics: Liverpool is, geographically at any rate, in Lancashire; and Glasgow has a language of its own. None of these Repertories was sterile, but even Birmingham, despite Mr. John Drinkwater and "Abraham Lincoln," was economical in creativeness and fathered no local drama. Must the conclusion be that the Manchester atmosphere has, with its soot, a vitalizing dramatic principle?

Possibly; but a less fantastic theory is that Manchester had Miss Horniman, and other Repertories had not. Again one insists that the Lancashire plays were a by-product, and a by-product only, of Miss Horniman's Company. Who in their senses would go to Manchester expecting to evoke a local drama? And if she had gone there with a prejudice in favour of poetic plays, it is more than likely that no local drama would have been evoked. Modern Lancashire is industrial Lancashire—one forgets the large agricultural oases, while nobody but map-makers and administrators

remembers that a slice of the Lake District is in Lancashire—and industrialism does not inspire the poetic play. Miss Horniman began, on the contrary, with a season whose best productions, though it included Maeterlinck, were Shaw's "Widower's Houses" and McEvoy's "David Ballard." Those two productions seemed, rightly or wrongly, to fix the type of play preferred by Miss Horniman's Company; it happened—let us call it realistic comedy—to be the type by which the life of Lancashire could be best expressed in drama and the future authors of the "Manchester School," most of them of an impressionable age, some of them already fumbling their way to dramatic expression, seized avidly the type and the opportunity. They were not so provincial as to have to wait for Miss Horniman to come to be introduced to Shaw: but there are worlds of difference between reading Shaw, even between seeing him indifferently produced, and a Shaw play transmuted by the handling of such a producer as Iden Payne. It is putting the case without hyperbole to say that Miss Horniman's Company was an inspiration.

The Repertory whose "note" is the poetic play will probably evoke no local drama, because, until we get the village Repertory, local drama is the drama of the modern town, wherein the stuff of poetry exists, if at all, only as a forced revival of folk-lore. Anything can be great poetry to the great poet; one speaks here of the average playwright, the observer of his fellow man in a provincial town, seeking his medium of expression in drama; and such a man is unlikely to find it in the poetic play or to find encouragement and inspiration from a Repertory where poetic plays are visibly preferred. It is almost to be said that Miss Horniman's Company and the Birmingham

Repertory Theatre stand for rival theories of the drama, but not quite ; they have too much, including Shakespeare, in common.

Local drama is too important to be left so specially in the hands of Miss Horniman and the "Manchester School." It is important for the localities and important, too, for London ; London is quite as ready to be interested in good plays about people in Aberdeen or Halifax as in plays about people in New York, but the New York author lives in a city where plays are produced and the Aberdeen author does not. The stimulation of local drama is possible only where a local producing theatre exists ; the education of a dramatist is unfinished until he has heard his lines spoken and watched his puppets move. Drama in the capitals is standardized to some half-dozen patterns which alter slowly and, failing the local producing theatre, what is the provincial author to do but to suppress his originality and to write plays, in hopes of London production, as near as he can make them to one of the approved current designs ? It is said that were it not for the continued influx from the provinces, London would die out in three—or is it two ?—generations ; and if that is true of life, it is true also of drama, and the plain duty of those who control British Drama, the Napoleons of the theatre, is to dig channels whereby healthy provincial blood may flow to London to revitalize its Drama.

This, which means that Sir Alfred Butt ought to seek out a number of intelligent producers and endow them in provincial Repertory theatres to work without interference from above, but always with the vigilant eye for that by-product of a rightly inspired Repertory, local drama, is a simple matter of commercial self-interest, on a par with the action of the magnates of scientific trade who endow research

not out of love of science, but in the expectation that they will be able some day to exploit profitably the resulting discoveries. So might Sir Alfred Butt exploit local authors discovered by the producers of his far-flung Repertories. The theatre is either a business or a gamble, and in the hands of men like Sir Alfred Butt it looks less like a gamble every day. Enlightened business self-interest would look a little to the future, to the fostering of authorship in provincial towns, to the establishment of many Repertories.

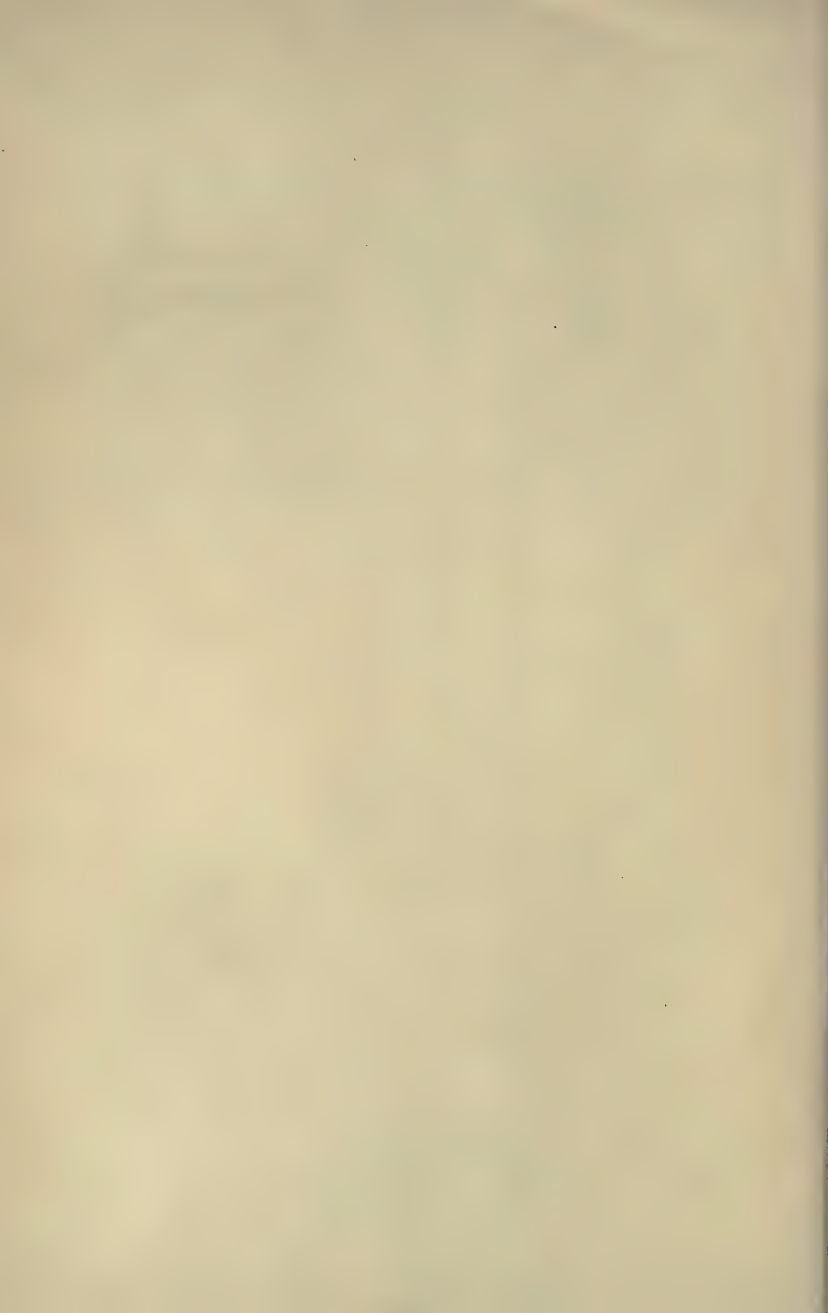
To come back to the windfalls of the "Manchester School" printed here. They fell, one of them in the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, at a time when Miss Horniman's Company was on vacation; another at the Liverpool Repertory Theatre, which was in origin a secession from Manchester headed by the late Miss Darragh, with the plays produced by Mr. Basil Dean, later the first Liverpool Director; and the third so far away from Manchester as the Empire Theatre, Syracuse, New York State, linked with Manchester, for all that, through being produced by Mr. Iden Payne. In reading them again, one is startled for the thousandth time by the difference between stage and study. The third act of "The Northerners" makes curious reading, because it depends partly upon the juxtaposition of the characters on the stage, partly upon the suggestion "off" of a ruse plagiarized from the Punic Wars, partly upon a spectacular "curtain," but it is—production proved it—in the focus of the theatre. It "came off" on the stage. Laughter in the theatre is, again, a mystery. It is possible that the Lancashire plays in general have the characteristic of acting more amusingly than they read. "Hindle Wakes" reads positively austere; acted, it is full of humour; and one's recollections of "The Game" on the stage make

for the same conclusion. It has, in the theatre, a far more pronounced tendency to set its audience laughing than seems apparent in its text. In the case of "Zack" the fun is, one would say, hardly of a subtle kind. Taking the "Manchester School," bye and large, and remembering the charge against it that it was "grey" or "dreary," one is forced to believe either that Lancashire humour is not everybody's humour—Mrs. Metherell in "The Game" might almost be set as a test—or else that the "Manchester School" has been confused with the whole body of Miss Horniman's productions; and, even if so, the charge fails.

There was an Icelandic tragedy produced in the early days of her Company, which depressed the thermometer alarmingly; there was Verhaeren's "The Cloister," a great play performed to empty houses, adding insult to injury by being popularly called "dreary," and the chill resulting from those two productions, one a mistake of management, the other a mistake of the public, lasted for years. The case of the Lancashire Plays is clear; their authors aimed at presenting the human comedy of Lancashire, and if their dramatic purpose was to be achieved by the alternative uses of laughter or of tears, they preferred to achieve it by the ruthless light of laughter. Many of the plays have not been printed and the appended bibliography includes no examples of the comedy of Mr. H. M. Richardson, Dr. F. E. Wynne or Mr. M. A. Arabian. Incomplete record of the Lancashire Plays as it is, it serves to drive home the contention that the "Manchester School" are, in the main, comic writers.

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THE GAME
A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

THE GAME

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

CHARACTERS

AUSTIN WHITWORTH.
EDMUND WHITWORTH.
LEO WHITWORTH.
JACK METHERELL.
HUGH MARTIN.
DR. WELLS.
BARNES.
ELSIE WHITWORTH.
FLORENCE WHITWORTH.
MRS. METHERELL.
MRS. WILMOT.
MRS. NORBURY.

The Action of the Play takes place in a Lancashire town on the last Saturday in April between the hours of one and five in the afternoon.

ACT I

AUSTIN WHITWORTH'S house in Blackton was built by his father in 1870 and the library is a stately room. The door is on the right. Centre is a deep bay with a mullioned window and padded window seat. A brisk fire burns in the elaborate fireplace, with its high club fender. Shelves line the walls. All the furniture dates from the original period of the house, and though the chairs may have been upholstered in the meantime, they would repay fresh attention. Solidity is the keynote of the room, but its light wood and bright rugs save it from heaviness.

The time is one o'clock on the last Saturday in April. A painting of old John Whitworth is over the fireplace.

In the armchair is EDMUND WHITWORTH, a prosperous London solicitor. A bachelor, his habit of dining well has marked his waist-line. Pompous geniality is his manner. In his hand is a sheet of notepaper which, as the curtain rises, he finishes reading. Sitting facing him on the fender is LEO WHITWORTH, his nephew. LEO is twenty-one and dresses with fastidious taste, beautifully and unobtrusively. He is small. Just now he awaits EDMUND'S verdict with anxiety. EDMUND removes his pince-nez and hands the paper to LEO.

EDMUND. I like it, Leo.

LEO. Really, uncle? I asked you to be candid.

EDMUND. Yes. I do like it. It's immature, but it's the real thing. (*Rising and patting his shoulder patronizingly.*) There's stuff in you, my boy.

LEO. You're the first Whitworth who's ever praised my work. The usual thing's to laugh at me for trying to be a poet.

EDMUND. A prophet in his own country, eh? Perhaps they don't know very much about poetry, Leo.

LEO (*excitedly, walking about, while EDMUND takes his place by the fire*). Is that any reason for laughing at me? I don't know anything about hockey, but I don't laugh at Flo and Elsie for playing. As I tell them, mutual tolerance is the only basis for family life. If I were a large-limbed athlete they'd bow down and worship, but as I've got a sense of beauty and no brawn they simply bully the life out of me.

EDMUND. You're sure you do tolerate them?

LEO. Of course I do. I'd rather have a sister who's a football maniac any day than a sister who's a politician. There's some beauty in catching balls, but there's no beauty in catching votes. What I complain of is that there's no seriousness in this house about the things that matter.

EDMUND. Such as—poetry?

LEO. Oh, now *you're* getting at me. All right. I'm used to it. Being serious about poetry's better than being serious about football, anyhow.

EDMUND. Sonnets have their place in the scheme of things.

LEO. A high place, too.

EDMUND. I agree with you in putting them above football.

LEO. Then you'll find yourself unpopular here,

EDMUND. At the same time, it's possible to overdo the sonnets, Leo.

LEO. Never. Art demands all.

EDMUND. My dear boy, if you're going to talk about art and temperament, and all the other catchwords

LEO. I'm not. I'm only asking you to tell them you believe in my genius and then they'll drop thinking I'm making an ass of myself.

EDMUND. I see. By the way, what are you making of yourself, Leo?

LEO. A poet, I hope.

EDMUND. I meant for a living.

LEO. I have a weak lung.

EDMUND. Is that your occupation?

LEO. It is my tragedy.

EDMUND. Um.

LEO. You will speak to them for me, uncle? They'll listen to you. At least you come from London, where people are civilized.

EDMUND. Are they? In London I hold a brief for the culture of the provinces.

LEO. You took jolly good care to get away from the provinces, yourself. And you mustn't tell me you think Blackton is cultured.

EDMUND. I heard my first Max Reger sonata in Blackton long before London had found him.

LEO. Music's another matter.

EDMUND. Yes. Your father played it to me.

LEO. Well, there you are again. Music and football are the only things he cares about. That's just what I complain of. I've tried to raise his tastes, but I find gener-

ally a lack of seriousness in men of his age. Of course' there are exceptions.

EDMUND. Thank you.

(Enter FLORENCE WHITWORTH, in golfing tweeds with bag, and without hat, hair tumbled by the wind. She is a large-made girl of eighteen, supremely healthy and athletic.)

FLORENCE. May I hide in here?

LEO. What's there to hide from?

FLORENCE. Eleanor Smith is tackling Elsie in the hall to play hockey for the High School Old Girls this afternoon. When she finds Elsie won't, she'll want to try me, so I'll keep out of the way, please.

EDMUND. And why won't Elsie?

FLORENCE. We never do when the Rovers are playing at home. I wouldn't miss seeing the match this afternoon for the best game of hockey I ever had. (*Slinging the golf-bag in a corner.*) Topping round on the links, uncle. You ought to have come.

EDMUND. I'm a sedentary animal, Flo.

FLORENCE. Yes. And you're putting on weight. It's six years since you were here, and I'll bet you've gone up a stone a year.

EDMUND. In my profession a portly figure is an asset. If you have a lean and hungry look, clients think it's because you sit up late running up bills of costs. If you look comfortable, they imagine you're too busy dining to think of the six and eightpences.

FLORENCE. Yes. I never met a slacker yet who wasn't full of excellent excuses. Leo calls his poetry. You call yours business. Wait till you'll retire. You'll find it out then if you haven't a decent hobby.

EDMUND. But I have.

FLORENCE. It's invisible to the naked eye. You don't golf, and you don't play tennis or cricket or——

EDMUND. I collect postage stamps.

FLORENCE. No wonder you're in bad condition with a secret vice like that. (*Goes to open window.*)

LEO (*sharply*). Don't do that.

FLORENCE. It's blazing hot. I can't imagine what you want a fire for.

LEO. Uncle felt chilly.

FLORENCE. Sorry I spoke. No, I'm not. It serves him right for taking no exercise.

(*Enter ELSIE WHITWORTH, who, like FLORENCE, is tall and muscular, but with a slim beauty which, contrasted with FLORENCE's loose limbs and occasional gawkishness, is, at twenty-two, comparatively mature. Her indoor dress, to honour the visiting uncle, is elaborate and bright.*)

ELSIE. Flo, Eleanor Smith wants you.

FLORENCE. I know she does. That's why I'm hiding in here.

ELSIE. They're a man short on the team, and——

FLORENCE. Didn't you tell her I can't play to-day?

ELSIE. She thinks she can persuade you.

FLORENCE. She can't.

ELSIE. You'd better go and tell her so.

FLORENCE (*gathering up her golf-bag*). Blow Eleanor Smith! She thinks hockey's everything. I hate fanatics.

ELSIE. She's waiting for you.

FLORENCE. All right. I'll go. (*Exit FLORENCE.*)

ELSIE. Heard the news, Leo?

LEO. Not particularly.

ELSIE (*excitedly*). Jack Metherell's coming in to see father before the match. Father told me.

LEO. Oh? My pulse remains normal.

ELSIE. You've no more blood in you than a cauliflower. I'm tingling all over at the thought of being under the same roof with Metherell.

EDMUND. May I enquire who Mr. Metherell is?

ELSIE. Do you mean to say you've never heard of Metherell?

EDMUND. I apologise for being a Londoner.

ELSIE. That's no excuse. They can raise a decent crowd at Chelsea nowadays.

EDMUND. Indeed? I live at Sevenoaks.

ELSIE. You must have heard of Metherell.

EDMUND. No. Who is he?

LEO. Metherell is a professional footballer, uncle.

EDMUND. Oh!

ELSIE (*indignantly*). A professional footballer! He's the finest centre forward in England.

EDMUND (*politely*). Really? Quite a great man.

LEO. Quite. He's the idol of my sisters and the Blackton roughs. For two hours every Saturday and Bank Holiday through eight months of the year forty thousand pairs of eyes are glued on Metherell and the newspapers of Saturday night, Sunday and Monday chronicle his exploits in about two columns; but if you don't know what "agitating the spheroid towards the sticks" means, you'd better not try to read them.

(ELSIE approaches him threateningly.)

He is also good looking and a decent fellow.

ELSIE. You'd better add that.

LEO. I will add more. He spends the rest of his time

training for those two hours, and when he's thirty he'll retire and keep a pub ; and in three years eighteen stone of solid flesh will bury the glory that was Metherell.

ELSIE (*threatening him*). You viperous little skunk.

LEO. I appeal to you, uncle. Can a skunk possess the attributes of a viper ?

ELSIE. If you say another word against Jack Metherell, I'll knock you into the middle of next week. You're frightened of the sight of a football yourself and you dare to libel a man who——

LEO. The greater the truth the greater the libel. You're a solicitor, uncle. Isn't that so ?

EDMUND. Do you want my professional opinion ?

LEO (*dodging round the table from ELSIE*). I want your personal protection.

ELSIE (*giving LEO up*). Uncle, Jack Metherell's the truest sportsman who ever stepped on to a football field. He's the straightest shooter and the trickiest dribbler in the game. I'd walk barefooted over thorns to watch him play, and for Leo to say he'll retire at thirty and grow fat is nothing but a spiteful idiotic lie.

EDMUND (*making peace*). Well, suppose we say he'll retire at thirty-five and just put on a little flesh and live to a ripe old age, fighting his battles over again.

LEO. Over a gallon of beer in the saloon bar.

ELSIE. If your head wasn't too full of poetry for anything important, you'd know Jack's a teetotaller. He's never entered a public house and he never will.

EDMUND. If I were you, Leo, I wouldn't quarrel. I should make a poem about it.

ELSIE. It's all he's fit for. Lampooning a great man. I tell you, uncle, Jack Metherell can do what he likes in

Blackton. If he cared to put up for Parliament, no other man would make a show.

LEO. Oh, the fellow's popular. They all love Jack.

ELSIE. Popular. There isn't a woman in the town but would sell her soul to marry him.

EDMUND. This seems to be the old Pagan worship of the body.

LEO. The mob must have a hero. Prize-fighting's illegal and cricket's slow, so it's the footballer's turn to-day to be an idol.

ELSIE. Look here, you can judge for yourself this afternoon.

LEO. Are you coming to the match, uncle?

EDMUND. Yes. I'm curious to see it. I suppose you're not going?

LEO. Oh, I shall go.

EDMUND. Really? I had gathered that you don't like football.

LEO. I don't like funerals or weddings either, but they're all the sort of family function one goes to as a duty.

ELSIE. A duty. Will you believe me, he never misses a match, uncle?

LEO. If you want to know, I go for professional reasons.

EDMUND. Professional?

LEO. I am training myself to be a close observer of my fellow men, and in a football crowd I can study human passions in the raw. To the earnest student of psychology the interest is enormous.

ELSIE. Yes. You wait for his psychological shout when Blackton score a goal. You'll know then if his lungs are weak. We go because we like it and so does he, only we're not ashamed of our tastes and he is. Wait till Jack Metherel'

comes on the field this afternoon in the old red and gold of the Blackton Rovers and——

(AUSTIN WHITWORTH enters while she speaks and interrupts her. Without being grossly fat, AUSTIN is better covered than EDMUND, whose elder brother he is. Without exaggeration, his lounge suit suggests sporting tendencies. His manner is less confident than that of EDMUND, the successful carver-out of a career, and at times curiously deferential to his brother. Obviously a nice fellow and, not so obviously, in some difficulty. With his children he is on friendly chaffing terms, so habitually getting the worst of the chaff that he is in danger of becoming a nonentity in his own house. He wears a moustache, which, like his remaining hair, is grey. FLORENCE follows him.).

AUSTIN. But Metherell won't.

ELSIE. What. Has Jack hurt himself at practice?

AUSTIN. No.

LEO. What's up with him?

AUSTIN. Nothing.

ELSIE. Then why isn't he playing?

AUSTIN. He is playing.

ELSIE. You just said——

AUSTIN. He won't wear the Blackton colours. He's playing for Birchester. He's transferred.

ELSIE. You've transferred Jack Metherell! Father, you're joking.

AUSTIN. No.

ELSIE (*tensely*). I'll never forgive you. He's the only man on the team who's Blackton born and bred. The rest are all foreigners.

FLORENCE. Who've you got to put in his place? There isn't another centre forward amongst them.

AUSTIN. There's Angus.

FLORENCE. Angus! He can't sprint for toffee, and his shooting's the limit.

AUSTIN. Well, you've to make the best you can of Angus. Methere'll belongs to Birchester now.

ELSIE. I don't know what you're thinking about, father. Are you mad? What did you do it for?

AUSTIN. Money, my dear, which the Club needs badly.

ELSIE. It'll need it worse if we lose to-day and drop to the second division.

AUSTIN. We must not lose to-day.

FLORENCE. You're asking for it. Transferring Methere'll. The rest are a pack of rotters.

AUSTIN. They've got to fight for their lives to-day. Birchester offered a record fee on condition I fixed at once. I was there last night with Methere'll and he signed on for them.

FLORENCE. It's a howling shame.

LEO. And over Blackton Rovers was written Ichabod, their glory is departed.

ELSIE. Father, do you mind if I go? I might say some of the things I'm thinking if I stayed.

FLORENCE. I'll come too. I wish to goodness I was playing hockey. It won't be fun to see Jack Methere'll play against us.

(FLORENCE *at door.*)

AUSTIN. It wasn't for fun that I transferred him.

ELSIE. No. Worse. For money. You've told us that and—oh, I'd better go.

(*Exeunt FLO and ELSIE.*)

AUSTIN. Go with them, Leo.

LEO. Shall I ?

AUSTIN. Please.

(Exit LEO.)

Well, Edmund ?

EDMUND *(puzzled)*. Well, Austin ?

AUSTIN. Now you can judge exactly how pressing my necessities are. You've heard it all.

EDMUND. Really ? You've only talked football.

AUSTIN. Football is all. I'm sorry I got in last night too late to have a chat with you, but *(shuddering)* what I was doing yesterday is public property this morning.

EDMUND. You mean about the man Metherell ?

AUSTIN. Yes.

EDMUND. I understand some other club has bought him from you. Are footballers for sale ?

AUSTIN. Er—in a sense.

EDMUND. And why have you sold him if he's a valuable man ?

AUSTIN. He's invaluable. If ever there was a one-man team, that team is ours. I've seen the others stand around and watch Metherell win matches by himself. But to-day money is more essential than the man.

EDMUND. I'm still puzzled. Is football a business then ?

AUSTIN. Of course. That's the worst of burying yourself in London. You never know anything. Football clubs to-day are limited companies.

EDMUND. I fancy I had heard that.

AUSTIN. Well, broadly speaking, and not so broadly either, I am the limited company that runs Blackton Rovers. You never cared for sport. I was always keen. In

the old amateur days, I played for Blackton while you went country walks and studied law. Football's always meant a lot to me. It means life or death to-day.

EDMUND. That's a strong way of talking about a game, Austin.

AUSTIN. Life or death, Edmund. Blackton's been my passion. It's not a town that's full of rich men, and the others buttoned up their pockets. Employers of labour too, who know as well as I do that football is an antidote to strikes, besides keeping the men in better condition by giving them somewhere to go instead of pubs. I've poured money out like water, but the spring's run dry and other Clubs are richer. They can buy better players. They bought them from me.

EDMUND. Have the men no choice?

AUSTIN. Up to a point. But footballers aren't sentimentalists and rats desert a sinking ship. The one man who stuck to me was Metherell. He's a Blackton lad, and he liked to play for his native town. To-day, he's gone. I made him go for the money I needed. The Club's been losing matches. We were knocked out of the Cup Tie in the first round. Lose to-day and Blackton Rovers go down to the second division. My Club in the second division!

EDMUND. Does that matter so much—apart from sentimental reasons?

AUSTIN. It matters this much. That there'll never be another dividend. The gate money for the second division game's no use to me.

EDMUND. But surely, if your public's got the football habit they'll go on coming.

AUSTIN. Not to a second division team. They'll drink

a pint or two less during the week and travel on Saturdays to the nearest first division match.

EDMUND. So much for their loyalty.

AUSTIN. They don't want loyalty. They want first class football, and if I can't give it them, they'll go where they can get it. As it is, the Club's on the brink of bankruptcy, and I'm the Club.

EDMUND. Then your men had better win to-day.

AUSTIN. They must.

EDMUND. And if—supposing they don't?

AUSTIN. That's why I brought you here. To look into things. I can't face ruin myself.

EDMUND. Ruin? It's as bad as that?

AUSTIN. Oh, I daresay you're thinking me a fool.

EDMUND. I think your sense of proportion went astray.

AUSTIN. All my money's in it. I don't care for myself. I had value for it all the day four years ago when Blackton won the Cup at the Crystal Palace, but it's been a steady decline ever since. What troubles me is, it's so rough on the children.

EDMUND. Have you told them?

AUSTIN. What's the use? Leo's got no head for business and the girls are—girls.

EDMUND. Yes. Tell me, what are you doing with Leo?

AUSTIN. Doing? Well, Leo's is a decorative personality, and he has a lung, poor lad. Leo's not made for wear.

EDMUND. Rubbish! If he's made you feel that, he's a clever scamp, with a taste for laziness and a gift for deception.

AUSTIN. Well, I do feel about Leo like a barndoor fowl that has hatched out a peacock.

EDMUND. Peacock! Yes, for vanity. A little work would do the feathers no harm.

AUSTIN. I can't be hard on a boy with his trouble.

EDMUND. I foresee a full week-end, Austin. And I thought I was coming down for a quiet time in the bosom of my family.

AUSTIN. Yes, we've been great family men, Edmund, you and I.

EDMUND (*hastily*). Well, we won't go into that again.

AUSTIN. Yes, we will. We quarrelled over Debussy. Come into the music-room and I'll play the thing over to you now. If you don't admit it's great, I'll——

EDMUND. We've other matters to discuss, Austin. This isn't the time for music.

AUSTIN. Yes, it is. Music makes me forget. Some men take to drink. I go to the piano.

(*Enter FLORENCE and ELSIE.*)

ELSIE. Father, do you want any lunch?

AUSTIN (*looking at watch*). By Jove, yes. Time's getting on. I'll play that Debussy thing afterwards, Edmund. Coming, girls?

ELSIE. No, thank you, father. Neither Flo nor I feel we can sit down to table with you just yet. We've had ours.

AUSTIN. You've been quick about it. Where's Leo?

FLORENCE. Stuffing himself with cold beef. Men have no feelings.

EDMUND. Surely Leo must have a feeling of hunger.

ELSIE. It's indecent to be hungry after hearing of father's treachery to Blackton.

AUSTIN. Treachery!

FLORENCE. Some of my tears fell in the salad bowl, and I hope they'll poison you.

EDMUND. Be careful what you're saying, Florence. Is that the way to talk to your father?

FLORENCE. No. That's nothing to the way I ought to talk to him.

EDMUND. Well, I know if I'd addressed my father like that——

FLORENCE. It's a long time since you had a father to address, Uncle Edmund. We bring our fathers up differently to-day.

EDMUND. If you only knew what your father——

AUSTIN (*taking his arm*). It doesn't matter, Edmund. Come to lunch.

(*Exeunt EDMUND AND AUSTIN.*)

FLORENCE. Yes, it doesn't matter if the Rovers are defeated, but there's beef and beer in the next room and the heavens would fall if food were neglected.

ELSIE. Oh, I don't care if they are beaten. The Rovers don't interest me without Metherell.

FLORENCE. I don't believe they ever did. You're no true sportswoman, Elsie. You always thought more about the man than the game. You might be in love with Metherell.

ELSIE. Yes, I might.

FLORENCE. Perhaps you are.

ELSIE. Is there a woman in Blackton who doesn't admire him?

FLORENCE. Oh, I admire him. But that's not loving.

ELSIE. No. That isn't loving.

FLORENCE. You sound jolly serious about it.

ELSIE. Do you realize that now he's transferred he'll have to live in Birchester—two hundred miles away?

FLORENCE. Yes, I suppose so.

ELSIE. What are our chances of seeing him ?

FLORENCE. Once a year or so when Birchester play here, instead of about every alternate Saturday.

ELSIE. I've been seeing him oftener than that.

FLORENCE. Do you mean you've been meeting him ?

ELSIE (*breaking down on Flo's shoulder, to her great embarrassment*). Flo, I do love him and I don't care who knows it, and now he'll have to leave Blackton, and I——

FLORENCE. Steady, old girl. I'm a bit out of my depth myself, but I'll do my best for you with father.

ELSIE (*braced up*). Father wouldn't stop me.

FLORENCE. He might try. Jack isn't quite our class, in a general way of speaking, is he ?

ELSIE. Class ! What is our class ? We're nobodies.

FLORENCE. Still, as things go in Blackton we're rather upper crust, wouldn't you say ?

ELSIE. Grandfather began life as a mechanic's labourer.

FLORENCE. Did he ? I've never worried about our pedigree, but you wouldn't think it to look at him. (*Looking at his portrait.*)

ELSIE. Oh, he made money. One of the good old grinding, saving sort. But he began a good deal lower down than Jack. Jack's father was an undertaker.

FLORENCE. An undertaker !

ELSIE (*hotly*). Well, I suppose undertakers can have children like other people.

FLORENCE. Oh, I've no objections

ELSIE. I've no objections either.

FLORENCE. I daresay not—to the father. He's dead. But the mother isn't.

ELSIE. What's the matter with his mother ?

FLORENCE. Haven't you seen her ?

ELSIE. Jack's shirked introducing me, if you want to know.

FLORENCE. Well, I *have* seen her, and——

ELSIE. Well ?

FLORENCE. She's a hard nut to crack.

ELSIE. I'll crack her if she needs it. If I want to marry a man, I marry him. I don't mind telling parents about it, but I don't ask their permission. That sort of thing went out about the time motor cars came in.

FLORENCE. Then why haven't you told father before this ?

ELSIE. Because Jack's old-fashioned and thinks he ought to speak to father first. He's got a perfectly ridiculous respect for father.

FLORENCE. Father's his employer. *We* don't think much of father, but I expect there *are* people who regard him as quite a big man.

ELSIE. That needn't have made Jack a coward. As father's ceased to employ him perhaps he'll get his out-of-date interview over now. (*She runs suddenly to window.*)

FLORENCE. What's the matter ?

ELSIE. I'm sure I heard a ring.

FLORENCE. You've got sharp ears. Do you mean to tell me that in this room you can hear a bell in the kitchen ?

ELSIE (*opening window*). It might be Jack.

FLORENCE (*following her*). Don't you know whether it is ?

ELSIE. I can't see any one.

FLORENCE. But I thought people in your case didn't need to see. Don't you feel his unseen presence in your bones like you feel a thunderstorm ?

(*They are both in the window bay. BARNES, the butler, shows in*

JACK METHERELL. *JACK is dark and handsome with traces of coarseness, tall and of strong appearance, clean-shaven, dressed rather cheaply but not vulgarly. A modest fellow, unspoiled by popular acclaim and simple-minded though successful. He remains near the door, not seeing the girls.*

FLORENCE *restrains* ELSIE.)

BARNES. I will let Mr. Whitworth know you are here.

JACK. Thank you.

(BARNES *half closes door, then returns.*)

BARNES. Mr. Metherell, I was thinking of having a little money on the team this afternoon. Can I take it from you that it's safe?

JACK. It depends which team you put it on.

BARNES. Why, the Rovers, of course.

JACK. Do you want to win your bet?

BARNES. I do that.

JACK. Then put it on Birchester.

BARNES. Really, Mr. Metherell?

JACK. Really.

(BARNES *pauses, then.*)

BARNES. I will inform Mr. Whitworth that you are here.

(Exit BARNES. JACK *watches him close door, then goes to bookcase, examines books, takes one out and begins to read studiously. FLORENCE motions ELSIE to remain and comes forward.*)

FLORENCE. Good-morning, Mr. Metherell.

JACK (*closing book quietly*). Good morning, Miss Florence.

FLORENCE. Are you much of a reader?

JACK. I'm striving to improve my mind.

FLORENCE (*taking the book*). Good gracious, you've got hold of Plato,

JACK. Yes. I have read him in the *Everyman* Edition, but I see this is a different translation by a Mr. Jowett.

FLORENCE. How learned you must be.

JACK. Not I, more's the pity. We've two members in the Mutual Improvement League at our Sunday School who can read Plato in the original. I wish I could.

FLORENCE. Do you? I'll put it back (*replacing book*). You'll have no use for Plato in a minute.

JACK. Why not, Miss Florence?

(FLORENCE *laughs and exit, leaving him looking after her.*

ELSIE *comes forward and puts her hands over his eyes.*)

JACK. It's Elsie.

ELSIE. Yes. It's Elsie. (*Facing him.*) Aren't you going to kiss me, Jack?

JACK. In your father's house?

ELSIE. It's as good as any other place.

JACK. No, it isn't. Not till I have asked his leave.

ELSIE. You've kissed me in the fields.

JACK. I know. I've compromised with my conscience.

ELSIE. Jack, if the rest of you was as antiquated as your conscience, you'd be a doddering octogenarian instead of the liveliest player in the League. Have you come now to ask father's leave?

JACK. I've come because he told me to last night. I might ask his leave though, now. But I think I ought to ask my mother first.

ELSIE. They'd better both be told at once. If you're going to Birchester, I'm coming with you.

JACK. You've heard that then?

ELSIE. Yes. Did you hear what I said?

JACK. About coming with me?

ELSIE. Yes.

JACK. I'm willing if they are.

ELSIE. Who are "they"?

JACK. Your father, and my mother. Suppose the banns go up next Sunday, we could get married in a month and make one bite of the wedding and the testimonial do they'll want to give me.

ELSIE. I couldn't be ready in a month, Jack.

JACK. Well, I'm ready any time.

(She kisses him.)

Oh, now Elsie, that's a foul. You know——

ELSIE. You didn't kiss me. I kissed you. I do what I like in this house.

JACK. It's a big house, lass. You'll find less breathing space in my seven-and-six a week house in a row, with my mother in it, and all.

ELSIE *(pulling him to the arm-chair and sitting herself on its arm)*. I've thought it all out, Jack. It won't be a house in a row. There are moors round Birchester, and we're going to live outside the town in a dinky little cottage where the air will always keep you at the top of your form, and I shall have a garden to look after and be handy for the links. I'm going to teach you golf. I shall drop hockey when I'm married. Married life demands sacrifices.

JACK. Yes. You're going to sacrifice a lot.

ELSIE. You're not going to begin all that over again, are you? Do you want to marry me?

JACK. Like nothing on earth.

ELSIE. Then I get you and nothing that I lose counts against that gain.

JACK. You've a fine sweet way of putting things. I

just go funny-like all over and the words won't come. But I love you, lass, I love you. I'll be a good husband to you.

ELSIE. It's heaven to hear you say you love me. I want no sweeter words to come than those, I don't deserve it, Jack. Who am I? Elsie Whitworth. Nothing. And you're the grandest, strongest player of your time.

JACK (*rising*). You think too much of football, Elsie.

ELSIE. That's impossible.

JACK. You do. Football's as good a way as another of earning a week's wages, but that's all it is.

ELSIE. It's the thing you do supremely well.

JACK. Yes. Now and for a few more years maybe, but I'll be an old man for football soon.

ELSIE. That's why I mean to teach you golf. Don't I tell you I have thought about it, Jack? You're going to be as brilliant at golf as now you are at football. I'll never lose my pride in you, your huge, hard muscles and your clean fit body.

JACK. It's a great thing to be strong and master of your strength.

ELSIE. Your splendid strength! Your swiftness and your grace.

JACK. But it's a greater to be clever, and I'd give up all my strength if I could write a poem like the one your brother wrote in the *Blackton Evening Times*.

ELSIE (*contemptuously*). Leo! That weakling.

JACK. He may be, but he's got a brain.

ELSIE. You're twenty times the cleverer.

JACK. Then I'm good for something better than football. I'm up in football now as high as I can get. I used to dream of being called the finest player in the League. They've called me that these last two seasons and my dream's grown

bigger. I'm honoured for my play. I'd like to gain some honour now for work.

ELSIE. You've just told me football is work.

JACK. I mean brain work. A footballer's a labouring man. And I want you, Elsie. I look to you to lead me to the higher path.

ELSIE (*dejectedly*). You think I can!

JACK. I know you can. You've got a fancy now for football, but it's not your real self. You're a cultured woman.

ELSIE (*interrupting*). Culture doesn't count.

JACK (*proceeding*). You've gone beyond the things that puzzle me. You're at the other side. Why, Elsie, there are things in Browning that I can't make out, and Walter Pater has me beat to atoms.

ELSIE. Those aren't the real things, Jack.

JACK. They're real enough to be the things that made me want you. I could pick and choose from lots of women fit to talk of football to me, but I'm tired of football. You're the only woman who can talk to me of other things—and you won't.

ELSIE. You're tired of football!

JACK. Not of the game. Sick of the eternal jaw about it.

ELSIE. Well, I'm sick of books.

JACK. You can't be that. Books last.

ELSIE. Your fame will last. Books aren't the real thing.

JACK. Then what is real?

ELSIE. Blood. Flesh and blood. I'd burn every book in this room for the glory of another rush like yours when you scored your second goal last Saturday. It may have

lasted thirty seconds, but it was worth a wilderness of books.

JACK. It was worth just half a column in the *Athletic News*.

ELSIE. It's worth my love for you. It's not your brain I'm wanting, Jack. It's you. You're splendid as you are. Don't try to hide behind a dreary cloud of culture. It's better fun to be alive all over than to crawl through life with a half-dead body and a half-baked mind.

JACK. Life's not all fun.

ELSIE. It isn't, but it ought to be, and for you and me it's going to be, and if you don't stop looking serious, I'll upset you by kissing you again.

JACK. Don't do that, Elsie. It isn't right yet.

ELSIE. Jack, you've a bilious conscience. It's the only part of you that isn't gloriously fit.

JACK. Give me till I've seen your father and then perhaps you'll tire of being kissed a long while sooner than I tire of kissing you.

ELSIE. It's so stupid to ask father about a thing like that. It's not his lips you're going to kiss. It's mine.

JACK. I've to satisfy my conscience, Elsie.

ELSIE. The poor thing needs a lot of nourishment.

(*Enter AUSTIN and EDMUND.*)

Don't stint it.

AUSTIN. Good morning, Metherell. Elsie, we've to talk business.

ELSIE. Mayn't I stay? Men are so funny when they're serious.

AUSTIN (*holding door*). You would find no entertainment this time.

ELSIE (*passing him*). That's all you know about it.

(*Exit ELSIE.*)

AUSTIN. Sit down, Metherell. Oh, this is my brother, Mr. Edmund Whitworth.

EDMUND (*shaking*). I'm pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Metherell.

(*They sit down, AUSTIN commanding the room from the club-fender.*)

AUSTIN. Very busy that train we came home by last night, Metherell.

JACK. Yes, very full.

AUSTIN. I couldn't get a chance of talking to you. Now, it's about this match to-day.

JACK. Yes?

AUSTIN. You know how tremendously important it is for Blackton.

JACK. Blackton 'ull be a second division team next season.

AUSTIN. I hope not, Metherell.

JACK (*without arrogance*). With me playing against them?

AUSTIN. I still hope not. Blackton must not lose to-day.

JACK. I don't see how they can help it.

EDMUND. You've a good opinion of yourself, I notice, Mr. Metherell.

JACK. Blackton Rovers without me aren't a team at all. They're certain to be beaten.

AUSTIN. You say that as if you don't mind if they are.

JACK. I belong to Birchester now, Mr. Whitworth.

AUSTIN. Come, Metherell, you've belonged to Birchester for half a day. You belonged to Blackton for five years. This match can make no difference to Birchester. They're

half way up the list. It's critical for Blackton. You've played all these years for Blackton and you've thought Blackton all your life. You can't change your allegiance all in a moment. You can't pretend you'd like to see Blackton go down.

JACK. Oh, I've a fondness for Blackton. I don't deny it.

AUSTIN. Metherell, Blackton must win to-day.

JACK. They might have done if you hadn't transferred me.

AUSTIN. My hand was forced.

JACK. So you told me.

AUSTIN. At heart you're still a Blackton man, Metherell.

JACK. Maybe. But at Football I've signed on to play with Birchester. I may be just as sorry as yourself to see Blackton go down to-day, but as centre forward of Birchester United it's my bounden duty to do my best to send the Rovers down.

AUSTIN. Look here, Metherell, you see the hole I'm in. What am I to do ?

JACK. I've no suggestions.

AUSTIN. What about the referee ?

JACK. Eh ?

AUSTIN. Anything to be done there ?

JACK. I don't understand.

AUSTIN. Could I square him ?

JACK. Not unless you want to see him lynched.

AUSTIN. Then you're the only hope.

JACK. It's a poor hope if you're looking for anything of that from me.

AUSTIN. I'm asking you to be loyal to Blackton for another day.

JACK. Were you loyal when you transferred me ?

AUSTIN. Yes : loyal to Blackton's very existence. Don't play your best this afternoon. That's all I ask.

JACK. I always play my best.

EDMUND. Are you never out of form, Mr. Metherell ?

JACK. I play at the top of whatever form I'm in.

EDMUND. Couldn't you make it convenient to be in particularly bad form to-day ? After your long journey to and from Birchester yesterday, a tired feeling's only natural.

JACK. I'm feeling very fit. Do you know you're asking me to sell a match ?

AUSTIN (*firmly*). Yes.

JACK. I couldn't square it with my conscience. I really couldn't, Mr. Whitworth. I know it means a lot to you, but I'm not that sort, and you ought to know it.

AUSTIN. Your conscience might be—salved.

JACK. Salved ?

EDMUND. Yes. Just let us know how much you consider will cover all moral and intellectual damages, will you ?

JACK (*to AUSTIN*). I'm glad it wasn't you who spoke that word.

AUSTIN. I endorse it, Metherell. I told you last night how I stood. The loss of to-day's match may involve my ruin.

JACK. As bad as that ? I'm sorry.

AUSTIN. Man, can't you see I'm not romancing ? Do you think I'd come to you with this if I wasn't desperate ?

JACK. It's a pretty desperate thing to do. Suppose I blabbed ?

AUSTIN. Yes. There's that. It ought to show you just how desperate I am. You know, and no one better, how this Club's been run. You know there's blackguardism in the

game, but Blackton hasn't stooped. Whatever other clubs have done, Blackton has stood for sport, the straight, the honest game. The Blackton Club's my life's work, Metherell. I might have done a nobler thing, but there it is. I chose the Club. I gave it life and kept it living, and the time's come now when I can't keep it living any more. Twice top of the League and once winners of the Cup. It's had a great past, Metherell, an honourable past. It's earned the right to live, and now it's in your hands to kill the Blackton Club and end the thing I've fostered till it's seemed I only lived for that one thing. It isn't much to ask. A little compromise to save the Club you've played for all these years, to save the club and me.

JACK. I cannot do it, Mr. Whitworth.

(AUSTIN *sinks hopelessly into armchair.*)

EDMUND (*briskly*). Now you referred to your conscience, Mr. Metherell. My experience is that when a man does that he's open to negotiation.

JACK. Money won't buy my conscience, sir.

EDMUND (*half mockingly*). Well, are you open to barter?

JACK. No. The thing I want from you is no more to be bought than my conscience is.

AUSTIN (*without hope*). You do want something from me, then?

JACK. I want to marry Elsie.

EDMUND (*shocked*). My God!

AUSTIN. Does she know? (*Rising.*)

JACK. Does she know? She says we're to be married and that's all about it, but I'm old-fashioned and I want your leave.

EDMUND. My niece and a professional footballer!

AUSTIN. Steady, Edmund. Now, Metherell, just let us see where we stand. You propose to help Birchester to beat Blackton.

JACK. I'll do my best.

AUSTIN. And you think I'll let you ruin me first and marry my daughter afterwards?

JACK. I won't buy Elsie from you at the price of my professional honour.

AUSTIN. Professional fiddlesticks! The thing's done every day.

JACK. Not by a Blackton lad. I've learnt the game you taught me, Mr. Whitworth, the straight, clean Blackton game. I'll not forget my school even at the bidding of the head. I'm not anxious to be suspended for dishonest play.

AUSTIN. Only incompetents get suspended. You needn't fear. You're skilful.

JACK. Not at roguery.

EDMUND. You're talking straight, Mr. Metherell.

JACK. Yes. It's you that's talking crooked.

(Enter ELSIE.)

ELSIE. May I come in now?

AUSTIN. No. We're busy.

ELSIE. Thank you. (*Closing door.*) You don't get rid of me twice with that dear old business bogey. I expect Jack's made an awful mess of it. Has he told you about us, father?

AUSTIN. No. Yes. Go away. We're talking seriously.

ELSIE. Yes. You all look very foolish. Is it settled, Jack?

JACK. No.

ELSIE. What's the trouble? Is father being ridiculous?

EDMUND. Upon my word, Elsie——

ELSIE. Oh, that's all right, uncle Ed. It does father no end of good to be talked to like that. Jack, I find I can be ready in a month after all, so that's all right.

EDMUND. Ready for what, girl?

ELSIE. My wedding, uncle. You'd better start thinking about your present.

AUSTIN. But——

ELSIE. Hasn't Jack told you we're to be married?

AUSTIN. He's told me he wants to marry you, but——

ELSIE. Then what is there to argue about? Men do love making a fuss about nothing and fancying themselves important. Come along, Jack. You're going to take me down to the ground.

EDMUND. Well, I'm——

ELSIE. Oh, dear no, Uncle. You're not.

(ELSIE goes off with JACK. They reach door.)

CURTAIN.

ACT II

The office of Blackton Football Club is situated under a stand, the slope of which forms its roof, down to some eight feet from its floor. In the perpendicular side are the windows, overlooking the ground. Used as much for the entertainment of visitors as for office work, the room contains only a desk with revolving chair, and a sofa to indicate its titular purpose, and for the rest is a comfortably appointed club-room. On the walls are sporting prints and, by the desk, a file of posters, the uppermost advertising the day's match. A door gives access, and a second door leads to the ambulance-room.

(HUGH MARTIN, the Club Secretary, sits at the open desk.

AUSTIN enters.)

AUSTIN. Well, Martin.

MARTIN. Good afternoon, Mr. Whitworth.

AUSTIN. What do you estimate the gate at? Five hundred pounds?

MARTIN (*rising*). The returns are not in yet, but hardly that much.

AUSTIN (*looking out of window*). I should call it a twenty thousand crowd by the looks of it.

MARTIN (*not looking out*). Not far short. But (*awkwardly*) there's been a little accident, sir.

AUSTIN. Accident?

MARTIN. Oh, it's happened before. They rushed the turnstiles on the shilling side.

AUSTIN. I say, Martin, that's too bad. Just when we need every penny we can screw.

MARTIN. About three thousand got in free before the police could master the rush.

AUSTIN. That Chief Constable's an incompetent ass. He never sends us enough men.

MARTIN. Fewer than usual to-day. There's a socialist demonstration on the recreation ground, and that's taken away a lot of police.

AUSTIN. Idiot ! Does he think Blackton people will go to a political meeting when there's a football match ?

MARTIN. As you say, sir, he's a fool.

AUSTIN (*sitting at desk*). No use claiming for the loss either. Pass me the cheque-book, Martin. Those people with the mortgage on the stands threaten to foreclose unless we pay on Monday. I'd a letter this morning.

MARTIN (*opening safe and passing cheque-book from it*). Can we meet it, sir ?

AUSTIN. Yes. Metherell's transfer fee is in the Bank.

MARTIN. That brightens our sky.

AUSTIN. Think so, Martin ?

(MARTIN *replaces AUSTIN at desk, signs cheque, tears it out and then puts book back in safe.*)

MARTIN. I never thought we should live through the season. And here we are at the end of it still alive and kicking.

AUSTIN. They'd better kick to some purpose to-day, Martin, or——

MARTIN. It'll be all right, sir.

AUSTIN. You're a sanguine fellow. Suppose we lose. Second Division. No dividends. No dividends, no Club. No Club, no Secretary, Martin.

MARTIN. Don't talk about it, sir. It's not losing my job. That doesn't matter. But the thought of Blackton going down is more than I can bear.

AUSTIN. Yes. It's ugly. You're a good fellow, Martin.

MARTIN. Don't mention it, sir. I love the game.

AUSTIN. The game! Yes. Always the game.

MARTIN. I often wish this side didn't exist, though it is my bread and butter. . . . That's the whistle. They're playing.

AUSTIN. Yes. Didn't you know? They'd begun before I came in here.

MARTIN (*reproachfully*). Oh, sir!

AUSTIN. Don't let me keep you from your place.

MARTIN. Aren't you coming?

AUSTIN. No. I shan't see much of this match, Martin.

MARTIN. When so much depends upon it!

AUSTIN. Yes. That's why.

MARTIN (*consolingly*). But you forget things when you watch the game.

AUSTIN (*kindly*). Go and forget them, Martin.

(*Enter FLORENCE, in outdoor spring costume, excitedly.*)

FLORENCE. Father, aren't you coming? You've missed it all. We've scored a goal in the first five minutes.

AUSTIN. Scored already! Thank God.

FLORENCE. The most glorious goal you ever saw. Blackton are playing up like little heroes. It's the match of the season.

(*MARTIN slips out.*)

Angus is in terrific form. I take back what I said about him. Metherell himself couldn't do better. He had the Birchester goalee beat to smithereens. I tell you it's tremendous.

AUSTIN. How's Metherell playing ?

FLORENCE. Against us.

AUSTIN (*impatiently*). Yes. But how ?

FLORENCE. How does he generally play ?

AUSTIN. Like that ? He's in form ?

FLORENCE. It's worth a guinea a minute to watch him. And you're missing it.

AUSTIN. I'll go on missing it, Flo.

FLORENCE (*looking through window*). Well, I won't.

(*Exit FLORENCE. AUSTIN sits down in desk-chair, staring at the wall, blankly.*)

AUSTIN. Metherell !

(*Enter from the ambulance-room DR. WELLS, a young sporting doctor, nice-looking, with dark hair and moustache. He is passing through to the outer door. AUSTIN starts.*)

Oh, it's you, Doctor. You startled me.

WELLS. I beg your pardon, Mr. Whitworth.

AUSTIN. My fault for day-dreaming. (*Rising.*) Ready for contingencies in your torture chamber ?

WELLS. All clear. You look rather like a contingency yourself.

AUSTIN. I'm—I'm nervous.

WELLS (*sympathetically*). It's a trying occasion. Don't you keep a bottle of whisky in that desk ?

AUSTIN (*smiling*). Don't you know I do ?

WELLS (*grinning*). I have some recollection of it. Take

my strictly unprofessional advice and have a good strong nip.

AUSTIN (*at desk cupboard*). Have one yourself?

WELLS. No, thanks. I'm going to look out for accidents.

AUSTIN. Ghoul!

WELLS. Every man to his trade.

(*Exit WELLS. AUSTIN mixes drink. Enter EDMUND.*)

EDMUND. Hullo! That's bad, Austin.

AUSTIN. Doctor's orders, Edmund. Will you?

EDMUND. No, thanks.

AUSTIN. How's the game?

EDMUND. Rowdy. You're not watching it?

AUSTIN. No. I'm praying for it.

EDMUND. So far the gods have heard your prayer.

AUSTIN. Metherell hasn't. I hear he's playing his best game against us.

EDMUND. I'm no judge.

AUSTIN. Are you tired of it already?

EDMUND. I find it just a trifle wearing. Perhaps I'm too old to appreciate a new sensation. The excitement's too concentrated. And the noise! I'm deafened.

AUSTIN. It's quiet enough in here. Those windows are double.

EDMUND. They need to be. Austin, about Elsie.

AUSTIN. Yes?

EDMUND. And this footballer. You'll have to put your foot down.

AUSTIN. I don't flatter myself I shall have much to say in the matter.

EDMUND. Hang it, you're her father.

AUSTIN. You heard what she said.

EDMUND. To my blank astonishment, I did.

AUSTIN. Oh, I'm used to it.

EDMUND. Pull yourself together, Austin. You've drifted till your authority's flouted by your own children.

AUSTIN. You know, Edmund, that sort of talk was all right in our day, but my children belong to the new generation, and the new generation regards parental authority as a played-out superstition.

EDMUND. Nonsense. Be supine and they'll tread on you. You've only your own slackness to blame for it if you're flouted.

AUSTIN. That, again, is the view of our time. We're old codgers to-day, Edmund, you and I.

EDMUND. Confound it, Austin, you're not going to take this lying down!

AUSTIN. No. I shall fight the fight of my generation against the next. I shall lose, of course.

EDMUND. You mustn't lose.

AUSTIN. Why should I be an exception to a natural law?

EDMUND. Natural law! Natural laziness, you mean. You've simply let your children get out of hand through sheer weakness, and if you don't care to exert yourself to save Elsie from a gross *mésalliance*, I will.

AUSTIN. Why's it a *mésalliance*?

EDMUND. Good heavens, man—a footballer!

AUSTIN. There spoke the acclimatized Londoner. Blackton won't be scandalized like Sevenoaks.

EDMUND. Oh, hang your smug imitation democracy! You don't believe that, Austin.

AUSTIN. I always believe in the inevitable.

EDMUND. It's not inevitable. It's incredible. Now,

I'll tell you what I'll do, Austin. I'll take Elsie back with me to London and cure her of this infatuation with a jolly good round of the theatres and the shops.

AUSTIN. My dear fellow! The theatres where she'll see nothing but romantic love stories and the shops where she'll go under your nose to buy her trousseau. Try it, Edmund. You'll be astonished at the result.

EDMUND. It seems my *métier* to be astonished to-day. First I assist at an attempted bribery, and now it seems I'm to see my niece marry the incorruptible footballer.

AUSTIN. You're a bachelor. The modern child surprises you. As a father, I have ceased to be surprised.

EDMUND. As a father your idea of your duty is to stand idle while your daughter makes a sentimental mess of her life. I begin to thank my stars I'm a bachelor. At least I'm not henpecked by a rebellious family.

AUSTIN. There's no rebellion about it, Edmund. I date from the sixties, they from the nineties, and we rub along quite peacefully in mutual toleration of the different attitudes.

EDMUND. Tolerating the difference means that you give in to them every time.

AUSTIN. Not quite.

EDMUND. Then you won't give in to Elsie?

AUSTIN. I shall be loyal to my generation, Edmund. She will be loyal to hers,—and youth will fight for her.

EDMUND. That means you'll put up a protest for form's sake and give in gracefully when you think you've said enough to save your face.

AUSTIN. No. Not if I can help it.

EDMUND. Austin, you must help it. The thing's unthinkable. I'll help you to help it.

AUSTIN. I shall be glad of any assistance you can give me.

(AUSTIN turns a little wistfully to window.)

EDMUND. You think I can't give much.

AUSTIN. Hullo! The game's stopped. I hadn't heard the whistle go.

EDMUND. I fancy I did a minute ago, without knowing its significance. What does it mean?

AUSTIN. Probably an accident. Heaven help us if it's one of our men!

(Enter WELLS and JACK, who is in green-and-white football costume, soiled on the left side, with his left arm in an emergency sling. ELSIE follows.)

ELSIE (anxiously). Father, Jack's broken his arm.

WELLS. Nothing very serious, Mr. Whitworth. I think it's only a simple fracture.

ELSIE. Only!

WELLS (taking JACK across). Come along in here, Metherell. I'll have it set before you know where you are.

AUSTIN (impulsively). Metherell.

JACK (as WELLS opens door). Accidents will happen, Mr. Whitworth.

(Exit WELLS with him, closing door.)

ELSIE. Doctors are callous beasts. (She opens door and goes out with determination after them.)

AUSTIN (scoffing). Accident!

EDMUND. Why not? Don't they happen?

AUSTIN. After my proposition?

EDMUND. He scorned it.

AUSTIN. Second thoughts. I asked for bad play, but

he's thinking of his reputation and he's broken his arm.

EDMUND. Deliberately ?

AUSTIN. Yes.

EDMUND. Heroic measures, Austin.

AUSTIN. It's the last match of the season. He's all the summer months to get right in.

(ELSIE returns.)

ELSIE. That doctor's turned me out.

AUSTIN. Of course. You've no right in there.

ELSIE. I've every right to be where Jack is suffering.

AUSTIN. He can suffer very well without your assistance.

ELSIE. You needn't be brutal about it, father.

AUSTIN. I'm not being brutal. The man's a professional footballer. He accepts the risk of a broken limb as a part of his occupation. Metherell's not a wounded hero.

EDMUND. No. He's simply a workman who'll doubtless receive proper compensation from his employers.

ELSIE. And from me.

AUSTIN. You !

ELSIE. This will hurry on our marriage, father. Jack needs attention now.

AUSTIN. Hasn't he got a mother ?

ELSIE. No mother could love him as I do. No one can nurse him as tenderly as I shall.

AUSTIN. Nurse ! A broken arm doesn't make an invalid of any one, especially a man in first-class physical condition.

ELSIE. I think it's very cruel of you to belittle Jack's injuries.

EDMUND. I wish you would stop calling him Jack.

ELSIE. It's his name. He wasn't christened John.

EDMUND. I refer to the impropriety of a young lady calling a workman by his Christian name.

ELSIE. As the young lady is going to be married to the workman in the shortest possible time, I fail to see where the impropriety comes in.

EDMUND. That is where we differ, my dear.

ELSIE. About impropriety?

EDMUND. No. About marriage.

ELSIE. Would you rather I lived with him without being married?

AUSTIN. Elsie!

ELSIE (*coolly*). Oh, it's all right, father. Uncle deserves a good shock. He's hopelessly suburban.

EDMUND (*pompously*). Elsie, I am older than you and——

ELSIE (*pertly*). Yes. That's your misfortune.

EDMUND (*angrily*). Will you allow me to speak without interrupting?

(AUSTIN *sits in the armchair.*)

ELSIE. Yes, if you'll speak sensibly and won't put on side because your mind's grown old and pompous as well as your body.

AUSTIN. Elsie, I won't have this rudeness to your uncle.

ELSIE. My dear father, uncle is being stupid. The only way to combat stupidity is rudeness. Therefore, I am rude.

EDMUND (*humouring her*). I propose to speak sensibly according to my lights.

ELSIE (*under her breath*). Ancient lights.

EDMUND (*reasoning*). Now, suppose we do permit you to marry this——

ELSIE (*reproducing his reasonable tone*). Be careful, uncle. Talking of permission is on the border line.

EDMUND (*avoiding irritability*). Suppose you marry him,

what interests can you have in common? I grant you he's a handsome specimen of manhood to-day, but retired athletes always run to seed.

AUSTIN (*self-consciously*). Hem!

EDMUND. And apart from the attraction of the flesh, what's left?

ELSIE (*cordially*). Oh, you are talking sense this time. It's difficult, but I shall manage him.

EDMUND. Shall you?

ELSIE (*confidently*). Oh yes. I couldn't do it if he were as old as you, because at your age a man's in a groove and sticks in it till he dies. Jack's not a modern, but he's young enough to learn. It's hardly credible, but at present he believes in Ruskin and Carlyle and reads Browning. Well, you know, I can't have a husband with a taste for Victorianism.

AUSTIN. Then why have him at all?

ELSIE. It's a curable disease.

EDMUND. He reads Browning!

ELSIE. Yes, but you needn't worry about that. I shall make a modern of him all right.

EDMUND. Do you mean to tell me a footballer reads Browning?

ELSIE. He can't always be at football. Oh yes. And Plato, only not in the original.

EDMUND. Why, the man's a scholar.

ELSIE. Did you think he was illiterate?

EDMUND. I'm afraid I have underrated him. Still, that only proves him an estimable member of his class. It doesn't alter the fact that his class isn't yours.

ELSIE (*hotly*). Class! What do I care for class? Elemental passions sweep away class distinctions.

EDMUND. That's a high falutin' name for a flirtation with a footballer.

ELSIE. It's a name I thought you'd understand. Personally I'd say I've got the sex clutch on and other things don't matter. Any more shots, uncle?

EDMUND. You needn't flatter yourself you've talked me into consenting to this marriage.

ELSIE. Nobody asked you, sir, she said.

EDMUND (*angrily*). Nobody——

ELSIE (*easily conversational*). Wouldn't it interest you to see how the game's going, uncle?

EDMUND (*relieved*). I think it would. But don't you think you've heard the last of me.

ELSIE (*sympathetically*). No, but you want time to think out a few more objections.

EDMUND. I am going purely out of desire to witness the match.

(*Exit EDMUND.*)

ELSIE (*looking after him*). Poor dear. He tried his best.

AUSTIN (*half rising*). And I am going to try now.

ELSIE (*pushing him gently back into chair and sitting on its arm*). Oh, I don't mind you. He tried like an outraged relation. You'll try like a pal.

AUSTIN. No. I'm going to be firm.

ELSIE. What a bore.

AUSTIN (*seriously*). You didn't expect me to be pleased about this, did you?

ELSIE (*pouting*). Why not, if I'm pleased? Jack isn't marrying you.

AUSTIN. Nor you, if I can help it.

ELSIE. But you can't help it, you know.

AUSTIN. Oh, I'm quite aware the stern parent isn't my game. But as pals, Elsie——

ELSIE (*nestling up to him*). Yes, father, as pals.

AUSTIN. As goose to goose, it's not the thing. Now, frankly, is Jack Metherell up to our weight?

ELSIE. He's above it.

AUSTIN. Above it?

ELSIE. Certainly. The condescension's his. He's a better footballer than ever you were, and you were no fool at football.

AUSTIN. Football isn't everything, Elsie!

ELSIE. Well, you play a decent hand at Bridge, but that's not much. Your golf's rotten. What else do you do well?

AUSTIN (*pushing her aside, and rising*). Really, Elsie!

ELSIE (*still on the arm*). Don't say "really." Tell me.

AUSTIN. I hope I'm fairly good at being a gentleman.

ELSIE. Doing, I said, not being.

AUSTIN (*humbly*). I—er—play the piano, you know.

ELSIE. Yes, but you're not a musician within the meaning of the Act. You play the piano like a third-rate professional, too good for a public-house and not good enough for the concert platform, whereas Jack's football makes him a certainty for the England team in any international match. You may have more money than he has——

AUSTIN (*glancing at window*). I'm not even sure of that.

ELSIE (*triumphantly*). Then you've absolutely nothing on your side except a stupid and obsolete class prejudice.

AUSTIN. Upon my word, Elsie——

ELSIE (*coming to him, gently*). Yes, I know I'm crushing, dear.

AUSTIN. You're pitiless. Youth always is.

ELSIE. Not always, father, but you shouldn't try to argue about love.

AUSTIN. I was arguing about marriage.

ELSIE (*away from him*). I suppose at your age it's natural to be cynical about marriage and pretend it's nothing to do with love. And then of course when you were young it used to be the fashion to mock at marriage. We take our duties to society seriously to-day.

AUSTIN. Are you proposing to marry Jack from a sense of duty?

ELSIE (*wistfully*). You'll be awfully proud of your grandchildren, father. They'll be most beautiful babies.

AUSTIN. You look ahead, young woman.

ELSIE. It's just as well I do. You're still worrying about a thing I settled weeks ago.

AUSTIN. Then why didn't you tell me weeks ago?

ELSIE. I hadn't told Jack then.

(WELLS opens door, and enters with JACK, whose arm is in a splint and sling.)

WELLS (*entering*). You'd better go straight home now. Never mind about the match. I want you to avoid excitement for a while.

JACK. The match doesn't excite me.

WELLS. Then you can leave it without regret.

JACK (*indicating his costume*). In these?

WELLS. I'll go round to the dressing-room and bring your clothes here if you'll trust me not to pick your pockets.

JACK. There's nothing to pick. I've more sense than to take money into a dressing-tent.

AUSTIN. Can't you trust the others, Metherell?

JACK (*drily*). Yes, so long as they're not tempted.

WELLS. I won't be long. (*Exit.*)

ELSIE (*watching WELLS resentfully till he goes*). Did he hurt you much, Jack?

JACK. Not to speak of.

(*AUSTIN watches her scornfully.*)

ELSIE. Oh, you're brave. But you shall come to no more harm. I'll see you home safely.

AUSTIN (*sarcastically, indicating door of the ambulance-room*). You'll find cotton wool in there.

ELSIE. What for?

AUSTIN. To wrap him up in.

ELSIE. Don't be spiteful, father.

AUSTIN. Good heavens, girl, a broken arm is nothing.

(*JACK sits wearily.*)

ELSIE. Except that the arm happens to be Jack's.

AUSTIN. The civilized world will gasp at the great event.

ELSIE. The athletic world certainly will. It's all very well for you to joke. Your arm's not hurt. It's all a gain to you. If Blackton don't win with only ten men against them, they deserve shooting. This accident means a lot.

AUSTIN. I know what it means—better than you do. (*Looking at JACK.*)

JACK (*jerking his head up*). What's that?

AUSTIN. As you tactfully remarked, Metherell, accidents will happen.

JACK (*rising*). Don't you believe it was an accident?

ELSIE. What else could it be? Do you think he broke his arm for fun?

JACK (*straight at AUSTIN*). It was an accident.

AUSTIN. No, my lad. It was a bargain.

JACK. I made no bargain.

AUSTIN (*sneering*). But you broke your arm.

JACK. By accident.

AUSTIN. A singularly opportune coincidence.

ELSIE. Father, what do you mean?

AUSTIN. You'd better ask Metherell that.

ELSIE (*in puzzled appeal*). Jack!

JACK. I'll say nothing.

ELSIE. Then what am I to think?

JACK. Think what you like.

ELSIE. I think you're a sportsman, Jack, and——

AUSTIN. I've known a sportsman do a bigger thing than break his arm for a woman.

ELSIE (*suspiciously*). A woman! What woman?

AUSTIN. You, my dear. And, as you said, Blackton are safe to win now.

(WELLS, *entering with JACK's clothes and boots, overhears*
AUSTIN.)

WELLS. I'm not so sure of that, Mr. Whitworth. It's anybody's game. The score's one all.

AUSTIN (*startled*). Birchester have scored!

WELLS. Yes. Didn't you know? I'll look after Metherell. You're missing a good game.

ELSIE. Then you'd better go and watch it, Dr. Wells.

WELLS (*slightly surprised*). I will when I've helped Metherell to change.

JACK. I'm in no hurry. Don't put yourself about for me. Half time 'ull do.

WELLS. Well, it can't be far off that now. (*Putting JACK's clothes over chair.*) I should like to see something of this match. Is the arm painful?

JACK. It's sharpish.

WELLS (*by desk*). Pull yourself together with a dose of this. (*Lifting whisky bottle.*)

JACK. No, thanks. I'm a teetotaller.

(AUSTIN is lighting a cigar.)

WELLS (*authoritatively*). And I'm a doctor, man.

JACK. That doesn't help my principles.

WELLS. Oh, all right. If you like to be stubborn. Are you coming, Mr. Whitworth? (*Crossing to door.*)

ELSIE. Yes. Do go, father. They'll be expecting to see you outside.

AUSTIN (*grim*). Yes—I'm going—to show them I can smile. Come along, Doctor.

(*Exeunt WELLS and AUSTIN.*)

ELSIE. Now, Jack. What's this all about?

JACK. Your father's making a mistake.

ELSIE. About what?

JACK (*exasperated*). It's a confidential matter, Elsie.

ELSIE. That means there's something you're afraid to tell me.

JACK. I'm not afraid. He spoke to me in private, and it's giving him away.

ELSIE. You can't give him away to me. I've lived at home too long for that.

JACK. I can't abuse his confidence.

ELSIE. Are you going to talk about your conscience again? Father said you broke your arm for my sake and I want to know what it means.

JACK. But I didn't, Elsie. It was an accident.

ELSIE. He thought not.

JACK. Yes. He's wrong.

ELSIE. Why should he think you did it intentionally?

JACK (*sullenly*). Ask him.

ELSIE. He's just told me to ask you. Now stop being absurd, Jack, and tell me all about it.

JACK (*reluctantly*). I told him we wanted to be married——

(*ELSIE nods, smiling approval.*)

—and he offered to strike a bargain. He wants Blackton to win, so I was to play a rotten game for Birchester.

ELSIE. And you couldn't do it.

JACK. No.

ELSIE (*enthusiastically*). No. You couldn't play badly if you tried, and so you broke your arm instead, for me. Jack, if I was proud of you before, I could worship you now. (*Patting the sling.*) Your arm, your poor, hurt arm, mangled for me. My hero, my lover and my king.

JACK (*disgustedly*). You think that too!

ELSIE. Think it! I know it. Don't pretend. It's too late now for modesty.

JACK. Modesty! Don't you see if I'd done that, forgotten my sportsmanship and sold a match for my private gain, I'd deserve to be kicked round the county?

ELSIE. No. I don't see it. You've hurt yourself for my sake, and that's enough to make of me the proudest woman in the land.

JACK. It's enough to prove me dishonest if it were true.

ELSIE (*touching the arm*). Isn't that true?

JACK. Don't I tell you that's an accident?

ELSIE. You've never had an accident before.

JACK. Not a serious one.

ELSIE. No. You're too great a master of the game. Accidents happen to the careless and incompetent.

JACK. Then I must be both. I fell and my arm twisted under me.

ELSIE. And you really didn't do it on purpose?

JACK (*hurt*). Elsie, don't you believe me?

ELSIE. It's so beastly to have to. I thought you were a perfect player, and you have an accident; and I thought you were a perfect lover, and you've been afraid to prove your love.

JACK (*stirred up*). Elsie, there are twenty thousand folk about this ground to-day and some of them have come to see the match, but more to see me play an honest game. They're just a football crowd, but there isn't a man upon this ground to-day but knows Jack Metherell is straight. It's left for you to say I ought to be a crook. You're great at golf and hockey. Is that the way you play the game?

ELSIE. Forgive me, Jack. I did want things to be right for us.

JACK. At any price?

ELSIE. I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking of the game. I only thought of you.

JACK. I know. But I want things to be right and rightly right.

ELSIE (*smiling*). And now they are.

JACK (*puzzled*). Your father——

ELSIE. We've only to let him go on thinking you did it on purpose.

JACK. But I didn't.

ELSIE (*soothingly*). I know. I know it was pure accident. But he doesn't.

JACK. He must be told.

ELSIE. I thought you wanted his consent to our marriage

JACK. I do.

ELSIE. Then let him think you've kept the bargain he proposed.

JACK. Let him think I'm dishonest?

ELSIE. What was he? What does it matter what he thinks if I know the truth?

JACK. He's got to know the truth. If he'd have me as a scoundrel for your husband, he should be glad to have me as an honest man. (*Smiling sourly.*) My arm's broke either way.

ELSIE. I don't care tuppence for his consent.

JACK. It's not the square thing to get married without.

ELSIE. Oh, leave him to me.

JACK. You bustle him so. It's not respectful, Elsie.

ELSIE. Well, you needn't take him under your wing as well. It's not the custom in this family to split hairs about filial piety. I'll make it all right, Jack.

JACK. It's my job, Elsie.

ELSIE. It's our job, and you've had your innings. Now it's mine. But I'm going to take you home first to your mother.

JACK. But my mother doesn't know about you, yet.

ELSIE (*drily*). It's time I made her acquaintance.

JACK (*doubtfully*). I don't know what she'll say.

ELSIE. We'll find out when she says it. You think a great deal of your mother, Jack.

JACK. My father's dead. She's both to me. That's why I'm anxious.

ELSIE. Anxious! But your mother wouldn't stop us, Jack.

JACK (*doubtfully*). You will be careful with her, Elsie.

ELSIE. Careful?

JACK. Yes. Not like you go on with your father. She's used to my way.

(*She has his unhurt arm, urging him to door, when it opens and AUSTIN, FLORENCE and LEO enter.*)

AUSTIN. Still here, Metherell!

ELSIE. I'm just going to take him home.

AUSTIN (*to JACK*). Wasn't the doctor going to help you into your clothes? (*To LEO and FLORENCE.*) Where is Wells? Have either of you seen him?

LEO. Last seen disappearing in the direction of the bar with an eminent London solicitor.

ELSIE. Oh, never mind him. Jack's clothes can follow. We'll take a taxi.

AUSTIN. But——

ELSIE. Come along, Jack.

(*Exit ELSIE and JACK.*)

LEO. I say, father, it's a jolly rough game. This must be one of the referee's slack days or he'd pull Angus up sharp.

AUSTIN (*genially*). The score's two—one for Blackton, my boy.

FLORENCE. Blackton play against the wind next half.

AUSTIN (*confidently*). The match is all right. I've something else to talk about to you two. You saw Metherell and Elsie?

LEO (*grinning*). Yes. It's a case.

AUSTIN. What?

LEO (*the grin fading*). Well, isn't it?

AUSTIN. So you know.

LEO. I've got eyes.

AUSTIN. You take it philosophically.

LEO. I don't see that it matters how I take it.

AUSTIN. To my mind it matters considerably. He'll be your brother-in-law if he marries her.

LEO. That had occurred to me.

AUSTIN. Don't you mind?

LEO. I don't mind. Metherell's a stupendous nut at football.

AUSTIN. I understood football didn't interest you

LEO. Merely academically.

AUSTIN. It's really far more your concern than mine, you know, Leo. In the natural course of things Elsie's husband will be your brother-in-law for a longer period than he'll be my son-in-law. Yours too, Flo.

FLORENCE. Yes. (*Pause.*)

AUSTIN (*exasperated*). Well? Have neither of you anything to say?

FLORENCE (*rather bored*). Not much in my line, dad.

LEO. Nor in mine. As I'm her brother I can't cut the other fellow out and marry her myself. I'm rather thankful, too. Elsie takes a lot of stopping when she's got the bit between her teeth.

AUSTIN. I don't get much help from you.

FLORENCE. Why should you?

LEO. It's no use jibbing, father. Much easier to give them your blessing and a cheque.

AUSTIN. It is always easiest to give way, Leo.

LEO. Yes. Isn't it?

AUSTIN (*wildly*). Good heavens, do you young people care about nothing?

LEO. We're tremendously in earnest about a lot of things, only they're not the things you're in earnest about. There are fashions in shibboleths just as much as in socks, and you're a little out of date in both.

AUSTIN. Possibly. But blood is still thicker than water, Leo. Metherell is a man of the people and——

LEO. Oh, my dear father, don't talk about the people as if they inhabited an inferior universe. The class bogey is one of the ghosts we've laid to-day.

AUSTIN. Indeed. I'd an idea it was rather rampant.

LEO. I believe it used to be. As a matter of fact, I do object to Metherell.

AUSTIN. Oh! You have some sense left.

FLORENCE. I don't. I only wish I was in Elsie's shoes.

LEO. Was I speaking, Flo, or were you?

FLORENCE. You were, too much.

LEO. I object theoretically on æsthetic grounds because of the destined fatness of the retired footballer. But I have Elsie's assurance that Metherell's a teetotaller and I trust her to give him a lively enough time to keep him decently thin, so that practically my objection falls to pieces.

AUSTIN. Leo, I didn't expect much help from you, but upon my word your cynicism is disgusting.

LEO. I expect, you know, that's pretty much what grandfather thought of you.

(Enter ELSIE and JACK.)

Hullo! are there no taxis?

ELSIE (*angry*). I think every taxi in the town is outside the ground, but the men are too keen on getting a free sight of the game from the roofs of their cabs to take a fare.

FLORENCE. It's a sporting town, Blackton.

LEO. I should have thought they'd take it as an honour to drive Metherell home.

JACK (*bitterly*). Not in the Birchester colours.

LEO (*sarcastically*). Sporting town, Blackton.

ELSIE (*at white heat*). They're beasts. Beasts. They jeered. They're glad he's hurt.

JACK. That's what you've done for me, Mr. Whitworth. I'm laughed at in Blackton. Last Saturday I was their idol, and now——

AUSTIN. You've done it for yourself, my boy.

JACK (*hotly*). You transferred me.

AUSTIN. I meant the broken arm, not the broken idol.

JACK (*scornfully*). Do you still think I did it purposely?

AUSTIN. I don't think, Metherell. I know. And I'm very much obliged to you. The chances are it's won the match.

JACK (*sulkily*). It *was* an accident.

AUSTIN (*playing his last card*). Oh, you needn't keep that up before the family. That reminds me. (*Turning to them.*) Leo, Florence, this is your future brother-in-law, Jack Metherell, the sporting footballer, who's sold a match to buy my consent to his marrying Elsie.

(*He watches LEO and FLORENCE for the effect. JACK steps forward, but ELSIE stops him.*)

ELSIE. Hush, Jack.

FLORENCE (*coldly*). I don't believe it, father. That consenting business went out with the flood.

LEO (*to JACK*). Did you ask my father's consent?

JACK. Yes.

LEO. It's just credible, Flo.

FLORENCE. In England? In the twentieth century?

LEO. These quaint old customs linger. Half the world doesn't know how the other half thinks.

AUSTIN (*who has been looking on amazed*). But aren't you horrified?

LEO. At his asking? No. Merely interested in the survival of an archaism.

AUSTIN. At his selling a match, man!

LEO. A man who would ask papa is capable of anything.

ELSIE. He's not capable of dishonesty.

AUSTIN. Oh, you're blind with love.

ELSIE. I have his word.

AUSTIN (*scoffing*). His word!

ELSIE. Yes. Jack Metherell's word. The word of the man I'm going to marry.

AUSTIN (*indicating JACK'S arm*). Deeds speak louder than words.

JACK (*with resolution*). Yes, Mr. Whitworth, they do. You think you've won this match. We'll see.

ELSIE (*frightened*). Jack, what are you going to do?

JACK. Play. Play for Birchester as I've never played for Blackton. I'll show him if I sold the match.

LEO. No. I say. You mustn't do that with a broken arm.

JACK. Yes. Broken arm and all.

LEO. It's madness. Look here, I believe you. So does Elsie.

FLORENCE. And I.

LEO. We all do, except father, and I assure you he's subject to hallucinations. Thinks he can play the piano. Thinks my poetry's bad. Thinks you're a rotter. All sorts of delusions.

JACK (*stubbornly*). Birchester must win. I'm going on that field to show them all what football is.

(*As he speaks WELLS and EDMUND enter.*)

WELLS (*with calm authority*). I think not, Metherell.

JACK. Out of my way, Doctor.

WELLS. I forbid it.

JACK. Much I care for your forbidding.

WELLS. One moment, Metherell. The play is extraordinarily rough. It's Blackton's game to lame their opponents.

EDMUND. More like a shambles than a game.

WELLS (*to* AUSTIN). The referee is strangely kind to Blackton, Mr. Whitworth.

AUSTIN. Oh ?

JACK (*suspiciously*). What ? What's that you said ?

WELLS. I say if I were referee I'd have ordered off half the Blackton team for rough play. This is no match for a damaged man, Metherell.

JACK. So you did try the referee, Mr. Whitworth.

AUSTIN. I don't understand you.

JACK. Don't you ? Well, rough or smooth, I'm going through it now. (*To* WELLS.) Thanks for your warning. (*To* AUSTIN.) And I warn *you* that referee had best be careful now, or I'll report him.

ELSIE (*holding him*). For my sake, Jack.

JACK (*gently shaking her off*). It is for your sake, Elsie, not for his. His consent's nothing to me after this. My record's going to be clean.

(*Exit* JACK.)

AUSTIN (*rubbing his hands*). Ah ! Splendid. Edmund, I've brought you down from town for nothing. The match is ours.

EDMUND (*drily*). Then I can devote my undivided attention to the problem of my niece. But why's the match yours ?

AUSTIN. Metherell is kind enough to give it us. An injured player is a nuisance to his side—no use and only in the way.

ELSIE. You don't know Jack.

AUSTIN. Oh yes, I do. You think he's a hero. I know he's a fool.

ELSIE. Then he's an honest fool, and——

AUSTIN. I haven't time to argue the point now. I want a word with the referee before the game recommences. (*Going.*)

ELSIE. So Jack was right. You did bribe the referee!

AUSTIN. Elsie, if you don't want us all to starve, you'll keep a tight hold of your tongue.

LEO. Starve!

ELSIE. Starve! What——

AUSTIN. Oh, ask your uncle.

ELSIE. I haven't time. I'm going to Jack's home to see that all's prepared for him.

AUSTIN. Oh, go to—— Go where you like.

ELSIE. I usually do.

(*Exit AUSTIN.*)

EDMUND. Now, Elsie, about this footballer.

ELSIE (*moving*). I shall be rather busy turning his bedroom into a hospital for the next hour, uncle.

EDMUND. You're to do nothing so compromising.

ELSIE (*scornfully*). Compromising!

EDMUND. If you insist on going, I shall come with you.

ELSIE. You will look funny in Elizabeth Street.

EDMUND. I prefer to look ridiculous than that you should look indiscreet.

LEO (*at window, crossing*). There's the whistle. Come along, Flo.

FLORENCE. Yes. They're playing.

(Exeunt FLORENCE and LEO.)

ELSIE. You mean to come?

EDMUND. I don't mean you to go alone.

ELSIE. I wish you were in London, uncle. Your intentions are so good.

CURTAIN.

ACT III

At 41, Elizabeth Street the combined kitchen and living-room opens directly to the street, the street door being centre, with the window next to it. Through the window the other side of the drab street is seen. A door leads to the stairs, while another gives access to the scullery. The room is fairly comfortable. A handsome presentation clock is on the mantel over the fireplace. The plate-rack is well furnished. Rocking-chair by fireplace. Sofa under window, behind which is a plant on a stand. Table round which three OLD WOMEN sit at tea. MRS. WILMOT and MRS. NORBURY, as visitors, wear outdoor clothes and bonnets, of which they have loosened the strings. MRS. METHERELL has grey hair, a small person, and an indomitable will. She is too hearty to be ill-natured, but she is mistress of her house and knows it. She wears her after-work dress of decent black. The remains of a substantial meal are on the table. Smoke-blackened kettle on fire.

MRS. WILMOT (*sighing*). Eh, yes. Elizabeth Street isn't what it was.

MRS. METHERELL. It's not the street, Amy, it's the people in it.

MRS. NORBURY. It used to be known for a saving street when I first came to live here. Every house had a bank-book

MRS. WILMOT. And there's more money coming into the street to-day than there was then.

MRS. NORBURY. And going out. They spend more in an ordinary week than ever me and my old man spent in a holiday week one time, and if they don't spend, they gamble, and nothing to show for it all at the finish.

MRS. WILMOT. Yes, and come begging off their mother as soon as they fall sick or out of work. And that uppish with it all!

MRS. NORBURY. Do you think I can get my girls to stay at home and give me a lift with the house of an evening? Not they. They've always something on that's more important than me. I'm nobody. And the money those girls spend on their clothes!

MRS. WILMOT. Time was when a man 'ud come straight home when he'd finished work and be satisfied with doing a bit in his garden. Most he'd ever think of, barring Saturday night of course, was one night a week at his club. Nowadays it's every night the same.

(MRS. METHERELL *moves impatiently.*)

MRS. NORBURY. I know. You did know where to lay your hand on them once, but there's no telling where they get to now.

MRS. WILMOT. It's all these picture shows and music halls.

MRS. METHERELL (*roughly*). It's all your own fault, Amy.

MRS. WILMOT. Why?

MRS. METHERELL. You let them put upon you.

MRS. NORBURY. I suppose you don't?

MRS. METHERELL. Our Jack doesn't carry on that road.

MRS. WILMOT. He'll have it out of you yet. He's quiet and deep.

MRS. METHERELL (*confidently*). He's safe enough.

MRS. WILMOT. Till he breaks out.

MRS. METHERELL. He's never broken yet.

MRS. NORBURY. You're lucky, then.

MRS. METHERELL. It isn't luck. It's the way you go about it with them.

MRS. NORBURY (*enviously*). Yours gets good money, too.

MRS. METHERELL. And I see it all. We've a use for a bank-book in this house.

MRS. WILMOT. I wish I saw the half of what mine get. Always crying out for more, but not to give it me. Some of them wouldn't be happy if they'd their own motor-car.

MRS. METHERELL. Yes. That's the way. When I was young a man could start poor and end rich. He'd save and stick to what he got. These lads to-day 'ull never rise. They're too busy spending what they have. My Jack knows a game worth two of that. He's improving his mind. His bedroom's full of books. Fitting himself to rise, Jack is.

MRS. NORBURY. There are a few like that. They're rare and scarce.

(*Knock at street door.*)

(*She rises.*) I'm nearest.

MRS. METHERELL (*rising*). Sit you still. (*Crosses and opens door.*)

(*ELSIE and EDMUND are there.*)

EDMUND. Mrs. Metherell?

MRS. METHERELL (*gruffly*). Yes?

(*Immediately on the "Yes," ELSIE enters past her.*)

EDMUND. May we come in?

MRS. METHERELL. Looks as if you were in.

(EDMUND enters hesitatingly.)

ELSIE. Have you heard about Jack's accident?

(MRS. WILMOT and MRS. NORBURY remain seated, eyeing ELSIE'S clothes.)

MRS. METHERELL (closing door calmly). Yes. There was a special out. They get papers out for anything nowadays.

ELSIE (indignantly). You take it very easily.

MRS. METHERELL. He'll be looked after. There's a doctor on the ground.

EDMUND (politely awkward). Perhaps I ought to introduce myself, Mrs. Metherell. My name is Whitworth—Mr. Austin Whitworth's brother. This is Miss Whitworth.

MRS. METHERELL (with some anxiety). Is Jack hurt worse?

ELSIE (gravely). Not that we know of.

MRS. WILMOT (rising). I think we'd best be going.

MRS. METHERELL. No. It's all right.

MRS. NORBURY (rising and tying bonnet-strings). I can see we're not wanted. We'll be seeing you again before you flit to Birchester.

MRS. METHERELL (by door with them). Many a time. We don't go yet. (Opening door.)

MRS. WILMOT. Good-bye.

MRS. METHERELL. Good-bye.

(Exit MRS. WILMOT and MRS. NORBURY. MRS. METHERELL closes door and turns to ELSIE.)

Now, what is it? If it's bad news I can stand it.

ELSIE. Is Jack's bed prepared?

MRS. METHERELL (*righteously indignant*). Jack's bed was made at eight o'clock this morning. Do you take me for a slut?

ELSIE. Oh yes, but he'll need special nursing, and the room—which is his room? (*Looking at doors left and right.*)

MRS. METHERELL (*drily*). His room's upstairs.

ELSIE. I'm going to see that it's right.

MRS. METHERELL. His room's my job.

ELSIE. Yes, yes. I know. But I must make sure. Don't you realize he's gone on playing with a broken arm?

MRS. METHERELL. He was always a fool. But he's not so soft as to take to his bed for a damaged arm.

ELSIE (*wildly*). Anything may have happened. Complications. Fever. I'm going to his room. Which is it, please?

MRS. METHERELL (*guarding the door*). You're not going.

ELSIE. I am. Please don't be stupid, Mrs. Metherell.

EDMUND. Elsie!

MRS. METHERELL. Do you think I'll have a girl I've never set eyes on before ferreting round my house?

ELSIE. But—oh, you tell her, uncle. (*Darts past Mrs. METHERELL and exit.*)

MRS. METHERELL (*calling after her*). Here, you come back. Cheek!

EDMUND. I think perhaps in the circumstances, Mrs. Metherell—

MRS. METHERELL (*with the door handle in her hand*). What circumstances?

EDMUND. Don't you know about my niece?

MRS. METHERELL. I know she's a forward hussy, like most young girls to-day. That's all I know.

EDMUND. Then I must explain.

MRS. METHERELL (*glancing off*). You'd better.

EDMUND. You see, she and your son are engaged to be married.

MRS. METHERELL (*pausing, astonished, then closing door*). It's the first I've heard of it.

EDMUND (*pleased to find her hostile*). Perhaps I ought rather to say they think they're engaged.

MRS. METHERELL. No. You oughtn't. Jack doesn't think he's tied to any woman till he's told me first and got my leave.

EDMUND (*delighted*). Ah, now that's quite splendid, Mrs. Metherell. I'm glad to find that you agree with me.

MRS. METHERELL. In what?

EDMUND. In opposing the engagement.

MRS. METHERELL. Why do you?

EDMUND (*easily*). Well, on grounds, shall we say, of general unsuitability.

MRS. METHERELL. I don't oppose. (*Sitting in rocking-chair.*)

(EDMUND remains standing.)

EDMUND. I understood——

MRS. METHERELL. I don't know owt about the girl. She's made a bad start with me, but she's excited and I'll give fair play. She may be good enough for Jack. I cannot tell you yet. What makes you think she isn't?

EDMUND. I didn't exactly think that.

MRS. METHERELL. What did you think? Out with it. You're her uncle, you know more about the girl than I can.

EDMUND. Well, the fact is I don't consider she would be a suitable wife for your son.

MRS. METHERELL. That's what you said before. I want to know why not. Has she a temper?

EDMUND (*on his dignity*). Certainly not.

MRS. METHERELL. Flirts then? Not steady? Extravagant?

EDMUND. No, no.

MRS. METHERELL. Well, is she deformed or does she drink?

EDMUND. Good heavens, woman, no.

MRS. METHERELL. If you won't tell me what's wrong with her, I must find out for myself.

EDMUND. There is nothing wrong with her.

MRS. METHERELL. Then, where's your objection?

EDMUND. My objection, stated explicitly, is—— (*Hesitating.*)

MRS. METHERELL. Yes? Go on.

EDMUND. I find it rather difficult to explain to you,

MRS. METHERELL. I've a thick skin.

EDMUND (*desperately*). My niece's training and upbringing do not make her a fit wife for your son, Mrs. Metherell.

MRS. METHERELL. Did you make a mess of her upbringing?

EDMUND. No, but——

MRS. METHERELL. How did you bring her up?

EDMUND. As a lady.

MRS. METHERELL. Then she's handicapped for life. But I have seen some grow out of it.

(*Enter ELSIE. She has a towel over her arm.*)

ELSIE. Mrs. Metherell, will you come upstairs a minute?

MRS. METHERELL. What for?

ELSIE. We ought to have hot water ready and I can't find the bath-room.

MRS. METHERELL. You'd have a job to find one in Elizabeth Street.

ELSIE (*blankly*). How do you get hot water?

MRS. METHERELL (*drily*). You heat it.

(EDMUND stands, looking on.)

ELSIE (*crossing to fireplace and making for kettle*). Then I'll take this.

MRS. METHERELL (*rising and getting kettle first*). That's for his tea. (*Glancing at clock, kettle in hand*.) I'll make it too. He always comes in hungry from a match. (*She replaces kettle, takes tea-pot from table, empties the used tea-leaves behind the fire, fills generously from canister on mantel and makes tea, replacing kettle and leaving tea-pot on the hob*.)

ELSIE. Oh, what have you got for him? He'll need nourishing.

MRS. METHERELL. There's a bit of steak-pie in the cupboard left over from dinner. He'll have it cold.

ELSIE. But meat is so indigestible with tea, and he's an invalid.

(EDMUND sits on sofa.)

MRS. METHERELL. Eh, stop moithering, lass. You don't know owt about it. (*Suddenly noticing*.) What's that over your arm?

ELSIE. Oh, I'm sorry. It was upstairs.

MRS. METHERELL. That's my towel when you've done with it. (*Takes it, then surprised*.) Where did you get this from?

ELSIE. The bedroom.

MRS. METHERELL. That's one of my best towels. It isn't out of Jack's room.

ELSIE. I've arranged the front bedroom for him.

MRS. METHERELL (*angrily*). I'd have you to know that's my room.

ELSIE. The other is such a cheerless, poky little place. It's dark, there's no fireplace, no proper carpet, nothing but a camp-bed and a second-hand bookstall.

MRS. METHERELL. It's good enough for him.

ELSIE. Nothing but the best is good enough for a man who plays football like Jack.

MRS. METHERELL. Football's one thing. Home's another. He's at home here. Do you think he sleeps in the best bedroom?

ELSIE. He must have the best-lighted room just now.

MRS. METHERELL. So I'm to turn out for him, am I?

ELSIE. That isn't asking very much. I don't believe you care for him at all. How can you sit at home when he's playing football?

MRS. METHERELL. Custom's everything. (*Sitting in rocking-chair.*) I'm used to my men being before the public. Jack's father was a public man—an undertaker, (*EDMUND winces*) and I've known him have as many as six funerals on a Saturday afternoon, but I didn't go to the cemetery to see he buried them properly, and I reckon it's the same with Jack. He can kick a ball without my watching him. (*Changing tone.*) And now perhaps you'll tell me what you mean by interfering in my house?

ELSIE (*to EDMUND*). Haven't you told her, uncle?

EDMUND. Oh yes. I told her.

ELSIE (*smilingly sure of herself*). Well, Mrs. Metherell, will I do? (*Standing before her.*)

MRS. METHERELL (*still sitting*). You said yourself just now that nothing but the best is good enough for Jack, so you'll excuse my being particular. I've been asking your

uncle about you and he tells me you're a lady, born and bred.

ELSIE. You mustn't blame me for my relations, Mrs. Metherell.

MRS. METHERELL. Nay, I don't. Mine's a respectable family, but there's a Metherell doing time at this moment, and another to my certain knowledge who ought to be. But this is where it comes in. If you're going to be Jack's wife, you've to know your way about a house.

ELSIE (*agreeing*). Yes.

MRS. METHERELL. Your father 'ull keep a servant, I suppose.

ELSIE. Oh, but I do my share. Servants require a lot of management.

MRS. METHERELL (*dryly*). I'll take your word for it. I never had any. And Jack 'ull have none, either.

ELSIE. I didn't expect it.

MRS. METHERELL (*graciously*). You may be handier than you look. I'll try. Those pots want washing. Let me see you shape.

(ELSIE *eagerly begins to put the used cups together.*)

There's a tray. (*Pointing to plate-rack.*) The sink's in yonder. (*Pointing.*)

EDMUND (*protesting*). Really, Mrs. Metherell—— (*He rises.*)

ELSIE. It's all right, uncle. (*The tray is loaded and she lifts it.*) In there, Mrs. Metherell? (*Starting to go.*)

MRS. METHERELL. Yes.

(EDMUND *opens door. ELSIE is going through.*)

That'll not do. You won't have a man about the place to wait on you. Close that door, Mr. Whitworth, and let me see her get out by herself.

(EDMUND closes it, and comes away. ELSIE tries to open it, the tray is troublesome and the pots slip together on it. MRS. METHERELL rises and crosses rapidly.)

Those are my cups, you know. Here, give it to me. (*Takes tray and exit, opening door with the ease of familiarity.*)

ELSIE. I'm sorry, Mrs. Metherehl. But I can learn.

MRS. METHERELL (*off*). Maybe. You've shown willing. (*She closes door from outside.*)

EDMUND. Come away, Elsie. You've seen enough of the Metherehl standard to show you it will never do.

ELSIE (*her confidence a little shaken, but still fighting*). I shall alter the standard.

EDMUND. It's fixed. You can't alter it. It's impossible.

ELSIE. The modern eye is blind to impossibilities. Have you ever been to an Ideal Home Exhibition?

EDMUND. A what?

ELSIE. They show you little houses fitted up with the cutest dodges for saving labour. I know Mrs. Metherehl will have to make her home with us, but it'll be a very different home from this. You can credit me with some imagination.

EDMUND. I do, if you think Mrs. Metherehl will ever believe her house is clean unless she or some one else has drudged in it all day. Seeing's believing, and you can't see the dust fly in a vacuum cleaner.

ELSIE. She'll have to use her common sense.

EDMUND. The scrubbing brush survives in spite of common sense.

(*Enter JACK, dressed as Act I., left arm in splint. He opens and enters without knocking, but he hasn't time to get his cap off before ELSIE is with him.*)

ELSIE. You're safe.

JACK. And sound, too, but for this. (*Glancing at his arm.*)

ELSIE (*hysterically*). Thank God.

EDMUND. Is the match over?

JACK. Three—two for Birchester.

EDMUND (*distressed*). Birchester have won!

JACK. I won the match for Birchester, if it gives you any satisfaction to know it. I haven't been a man. I've been a miracle.

ELSIE. You always were.

JACK. I've only done my human best before to-day. To-day I've been a superman, a thing inspired, protected guarded by a greater mastery than I have ever known. It wasn't football as it is in life. It's been the football of my dreams.

EDMUND. It makes you talk.

JACK. I'm still intoxicated with the glamour of that game.

EDMUND. Yes, Metherell, success is sweet. But somebody is suffering for this.

ELSIE. Who?

EDMUND. If Birchester have won, Blackton have lost.

ELSIE. For an outsider, you take it seriously.

EDMUND. I take it seriously for your father. I ought to be with him now.

ELSIE. Haven't you done enough here for the proprieties?

EDMUND. I must go to your father, Elsie. Come.

ELSIE. I stay here with Jack.

EDMUND (*after a struggle*). Very well.

(*Exit EDMUND.*)

JACK (*taking cap off*). Elsie, what are you doing here?

ELSIE. I came to—to see your mother.

JACK. You've told her about us ?

ELSIE. Yes.

JACK. It should have come from me. She'd expect that. But no matter, now she knows. What did she say ?

ELSIE (*hesitating, then plunging*). It's—it's all right, Jack.

JACK. Hurrah ! Then we've a clear road now. I was a bit afraid. Mother has a will of her own, and she's not easy to please. But I might have known she couldn't resist you. Tell me what she said when you pleaded to her with the loveliest eyes in the world and told her you loved me.

ELSIE (*awkwardly*). Well——

JACK (*interrupting enthusiastically*). Yes, I know— you needn't tell me. I can see it all. You there, she here, and then you fell into each other's arms, and she kissed you, and what you said to each other I'm not to know, for it was women's talk not meant for men to hear.

ELSIE. Jack, you've never been like this before.

JACK. No, I've never played a great game with a broken arm and come through it unscathed. I've never—oh, but it's you that's done the greatest thing for me. You've won my mother for us. That was the cloud that used to get between.

ELSIE. And made you talk of self-improvement instead of my eyes ? It's only now I learn you know my eyes are good.

JACK. I have always known the beauty of your eyes.

ELSIE. You couldn't tell me about them.

JACK. Not till it was all made right with mother. I thought last night to-day would be the saddest day I've known. I had to play for Birchester and go away from Blackton and from you. And there was mother, but you

were brave and took that burden from me, and I'm glad, Elsie, I'm glad of everything.

ELSIE. Even of that? (*Touching his arm.*)

JACK. It's brought me luck. It's brought me you, safely secure at last. I wish I had a dozen arms to break.

ELSIE (*smiling*). To get a dozen me's?

JACK. To suffer with for you.

ELSIE (*quickly*). You are suffering?

JACK. This bit of pain is nothing to a bad conscience, and it's that I had meeting you and knowing I'd not the pluck to have it out with mother. (*With a touch of brutality.*) But now I've got you for my own. No, not a dozen of you, Elsie. One's good enough for me. (*He puts his arm round her, kissing roughly.*)

ELSIE (*frightened*). Jack, you're very strong.

JACK (*squeezing masterfully*). I've only one arm, but it's strong.

ELSIE. I love your strength, Jack, but you do take my breath away. You've never kissed me like that before.

JACK (*still holding her against her will*). I've not been free before. I've kissed you guiltily, not as a free man kisses when he can give his whole mind to it.

ELSIE. Jack, let me go.

JACK. Don't you like it? I said you'd be the first to tire of kissing.

ELSIE (*free of him*). It's—it's almost terrifying, Jack.

JACK (*roughly*). Rubbish, lass, you're not made of glass. You can stand it. I needn't kiss you like I kiss my mother.

ELSIE. How do you kiss your mother?

JACK. Why, respectfully.

ELSIE. You don't respect me, then?

JACK. It's not the same. I love you.

ELSIE (*rather more hopefully*). And you don't love her?

JACK. It's different. Where is she now?

ELSIE (*indicating*). She went in there to wash some pots.

JACK (*nodding, anxiously*). She does too much of that. The work comes heavy at her age.

ELSIE. We'll change all that.

JACK (*eagerly*). Yes. Four hands 'ull make it easy.

ELSIE. My methods will be very different.

JACK. Different? She'll not like changing her ways. Old people don't like change.

ELSIE (*callously*). No, but it's good for them.

JACK. My getting married 'ull be change enough. We must be careful not to upset her.

ELSIE. You're very fond of your mother, Jack.

JACK. I try to do my duty.

ELSIE (*gladly*). It's only duty, then?

JACK. Only! Honour thy father and thy mother that—

ELSIE. Yes, but I don't want to make old bones. And that honouring business is a bit fly-blown. We spell it humour your parents nowadays and not too much of that. A badly brought up parent's worse than a spoilt child.

JACK. Of course, you're joking, Elsie, and I know I'm not a judge of taste, but I don't somehow think we ought to make fun of our parents.

ELSIE. I wasn't joking, Jack. If your mother's going to stay with us, she'll have to realize the century she's living in.

JACK (*reprovingly*). My mother's mistress of this house, Elsie.

ELSIE. This house. Yes. But we're going to be happy in a cottage on the moors by Birchester, and if people who've forgotten what it is to be young try any interference, so much the worse for them.

JACK (*angrily*). Did you tell her that before you asked about the marrying?

ELSIE. Tell her what?

JACK. That you expected her to take a back seat and watch you interfering with her arrangements?

ELSIE. Interfering's not the word. They'll be revolutionized. Our cottage will be run on rational and hygienic principles.

JACK. I'd rather have it comfortable.

ELSIE. It will be comfortable.

JACK. With you and her squabbling all the time?

ELSIE (*very discouraged, but still brave*). We shan't squabble if she'll be sensible.

JACK. Her idea of sense mayn't be the same as yours.

ELSIE. It probably won't. It's all right, Jack. I've had practice in handling parents.

JACK. I've seen a bit of it, too. You shan't treat mother that way. If we're to marry, Elsie—

ELSIE. *If* we're to marry!

JACK. My mother's first with me. I take my orders from her and you'll just have to do the same.

(*Enter MRS. METHERELL. She has an apron on which she wipes her hands and then takes it off, hanging up behind door.*)

MRS. METHERELL. So you've broken your arm, I hear.

JACK (*his attitude is that of a weak-willed child. He almost cowers before her*). Yes, mother.

MRS. METHERELL. Wasn't there work enough with a flitting without fetching and carrying for you? Who's going to break the coals now?

ELSIE. Mrs. Metherell!

JACK. It's all right, Elsie. It's just her way.

MRS. METHERELL (*turning on ELSIE*). And you've been turning my house upside down upstairs. A lot of need you have to talk, my girl. You've been in here ten minutes with a famished man and not so much as lifted a hand to put out his food. I told you where it was.

ELSIE. I'm sorry. (*Going in terrified alacrity to cupboard, and finding plate of cold steak pie, which she puts on table.*)

MRS. METHERELL (*with rough kindness*). Sit you down, Jack. (*Lifts teapot to table and pours.*)

ELSIE. Oh, that tea's been made so long.

JACK. I like it black.

ELSIE. I'm sure Jack ought to have——

MRS. METHERELL. Jack 'ull have what I provide for him, and be thankful he's got it.

(*ELSIE fusses over JACK's plate, cutting up small.*)

ELSIE (*to JACK*). You'll be having late dinners in a month.

(*MRS. METHERELL is returning teapot to hob.*)

JACK. She'll never let us.

MRS. METHERELL (*returning*). I'll do that.

(*ELSIE moves away.*)

If he's to be spoon-fed, I'll feed him.

ELSIE (*timidly*). I was doing it to help you, Mrs. MethereLL.

MRS. METHERELL. You were doing it to show how fond you are. What's this I hear about you, Jack?

JACK (*his mouth full*). Well, she's told you.

MRS. METHERELL. Hadn't you a tongue in your own mouth?

JACK. I'd have told you to-night.

MRS. METHERELL. Going courting behind my back.

JACK. You will have your grumble, mother.

MRS. METHERELL. I'd do more than grumble if you hadn't gone and hurt yourself. You might have done it on purpose just to get on the soft side of me.

ELSIE. Is this your soft side, Mrs. Metherell?

MRS. METHERELL. Yes. Company manners. I'm keeping what I have to say to Jack till you've gone.

ELSIE. Jack's ill. You're not to bully him.

MRS. METHERELL. Is he your son or mine? Because if he's mine I'll not ask your leave to say what I like to him. I'm mistress here.

ELSE. Yes, but, Mrs. Metherell——

MRS. METHERELL. That'll do from you. I've had enough of your back answers. You talk too much.

(*Knock at door. MRS. METHERELL, eyeing ELSIE as she goes, opens door. AUSTIN is outside.*)

AUSTIN. Mrs. Metherell?

MRS. METHERELL. Yes.

ELSIE (*coming forward on hearing the voice*). Father!

AUSTIN. You here, Elsie! (*Entering—to MRS. METHERELL.*) Thank you.

(*MRS. METHERELL closes door grimly.*)

Well, Metherell, I've come to see how you are.

JACK (*rising*). I wasn't carried off the field, but it isn't you I have to thank for it.

AUSTIN (*sincerely*). No. It's your own magnificent skill. I never saw such play.

MRS. METHERELL (*coming between them*). You'll excuse me, but I don't allow that kind of talk in here.

AUSTIN (*surprised*). But I was praising your son, Mrs. Metherell.

MRS. METHERELL. He's buttered up too much outside. In here he get's his makeweight of the other thing.

JACK. There's no more praise for me in this town, mother. I'm not popular. They've lost a lot of money on this match.

MRS. METHERELL. Was that your fault?

JACK. I played for Birchester. The bets were made on Blackton before they knew I was transferred.

MRS. METHERELL (*indignantly*). They're blaming *you* for that?

AUSTIN. Fair weather sportsmen!

JACK. There's no denying I won the match for Birchester.

MRS. METHERELL (*indignantly*). Whose fault was it you played for Birchester? Yours? No. There stands the man you have to thank for that.

AUSTIN (*taken aback*). Really, Mrs. Metherell, I was hardly prepared——

MRS. METHERELL (*accusingly*). You've made my Jack unpopular. That's what you've done. (*Looking at JACK proudly, while he expresses blank astonishment.*) There never was a favourite like Jack. Not a man in the whole of Blackton but looked up to Jack, nor a woman but envied me my son.

JACK. But, mother, I didn't know you cared. You've always——

MRS. METHERELL. You didn't know I cared! Because I haven't gone and shouted with the others round the field, because I haven't dinned it in your ears and did my level best to stop them spoiling you, do you think I took no pride in knowing you're the idol of the town? I'll show you if I care. Out of that door, Mr. Whitworth. Out of that door, I say. You've brought trouble on this house.

AUSTIN. Really, this is very embarrassing.

MRS. METHERELL. I'll embarrass you. You've made my Jack unpopular. What do you want here? Your daughter? Take her and go.

AUSTIN. What I wanted was a little private conversation with your son, Mrs Metherell.

MRS. METHERELL. You've finished with my son. You're not his master now.

AUSTIN. No. But as a friend, I hoped——

MRS. METHERELL. And you're not his friend.

AUSTIN. I can't make things clear if you won't let me, Mrs. Metherell.

MRS. METHERELL. They're clear enough.

AUSTIN (*desperately*). Metherell, will you do me the favour of stepping outside with me for three minutes' business conversation?

MRS. METHERELL (*scoffing*). Business!

ELSIE. You have no business now with Jack that doesn't include me. If Jack goes, I go.

AUSTIN. This includes you.

MRS. METHERELL. Jack doesn't go. Jack stays where he is.

AUSTIN (*trying to be dignified*). Do you know who I am?

MRS. METHERELL. You're the man who's flitting me to Birchester. Turning me out of my house, me that's lived in Blackton all my life, to go to a strange town and buy in strange shops where'll they rob me, and live beside strangers instead of here where everybody knew me for the mother of Jack Metherell.

ELSIE. But from what Jack says, Mrs. Metherell, Blackton won't be very pleasant for you now.

MRS. METHERELL (*hotly*). Who's made it so?

AUSTIN. Mrs. Metherell, can't we be friends? I've always been on friendly terms in Club affairs with Jack, until to-day.

MRS. METHERELL. A lot can happen in a day.

AUSTIN. Yes. To-day the club has died.

ELSIE. Died!

AUSTIN. Yes. You know something of what the club has meant to me. I made it, built it, fostered it, and now it's dead. There's been a meeting since the match. The other directors had pence in where I had pounds. They won't put another farthing down to save the club, and I can't. I'm ruined. But that isn't what I'm here for now. I've lost to-day a greater thing than money.

ELSIE. Ruined! Father, what do you mean?

MRS. METHERELL. You needn't fret. Ruined is a way of talking. He'll have a nest-egg left to pay your servants and your milliner's bills.

AUSTIN. No. It means literally ruined. Metherell has cause to know my case was pretty desperate.

JACK. I didn't know how bad.

AUSTIN. Could you have acted any differently if you had?

JACK. You know I couldn't.

AUSTIN (*sincerely*). No. You've showed up well to-day, and I've showed badly.

JACK (*sympathetically*). You were in a hole.

AUSTIN. A man can never tell beforehand what he'll do in a tight corner, but he can be ashamed afterwards if he's done the wrong thing. And I'm—I'm trying now to snatch some rags of self-respect. Won't you help me, Mrs. Metherell?

MRS. METHERELL (*graciously*). Well, maybe a drowning

man can't be particular what straw he clutches at. What can I do ?

AUSTIN. Jack was the straw I clutched. I tempted him, and, to his honour and my own dishonour, he withstood me. But I owe him reparation, and I want to pay. If I can see these two young people happy, I shan't feel utterly debased. I shall have rescued from the wreck enough to give me back my soul.

MRS. METHERELL (*hardening again*). That's a grand high way to talk about a bit of conscience-money.

AUSTIN (*humbly*). Yes, call it conscience-money if you like, although I have no money now, and money won't buy me back my peace of mind. I'm going to do the one thing in my power to right the wrong I did to Jack this afternoon. I'm going to put this marriage through.

MRS. METHERELL (*ironically*). Oh ? What marriage may that be ?

AUSTIN. Don't you know ?

ELSIE. Of course she knows.

AUSTIN. Then that's all right, and a load's gone off my mind.

ELSIE. One moment, father.

AUSTIN. Yes. What is it ?

ELSIE. I'm not so confident about it as I was.

AUSTIN. As you were when ? It's not an hour since you defied the world to stand between you and Jack.

ELSIE. It's not the world that stands between. It's Mrs. Metherell.

JACK. Elsie ! (*Going towards her, then standing bewildered,*)

AUSTIN. Mrs. Metherell ! (*Turning to her genially,*)

Oh, come, we parents have to make this sacrifice to see our children happy.

MRS. METHERELL. I care as much about Jack's happiness as you.

AUSTIN. Then we're unanimous. That's settled then.

ELSIE. (*quietly*). Not quite.

AUSTIN. Why not. (*Looking at JACK.*) You told me my consent was all you wanted.

MRS. METHERELL (*eyeing JACK*). Did you?

JACK. No. I said I'd want yours too.

AUSTIN. Of course. Well, you've got my consent now, freely, gladly given.

JACK. Yes, I wanted that.

AUSTIN. Isn't that everything?

ELSIE. No. I've been thinking.

AUSTIN. I thought you knew your own mind, Elsie.

ELSIE. I didn't know Mrs. Metherell. Perhaps I didn't know Jack.

AUSTIN (*still with confidence*). There's been some lovers' tiff between you. Come, Elsie, I divided you this afternoon. Let me unite you now. What is the difficulty? I'm sure it's just a temporary trifle.

ELSIE. Whether it's temporary depends on how long Mrs. Metherell proposes to live.

MRS. METHERELL (*enjoying herself*). I'm hearty, thank you. Mine's a long-lived family.

AUSTIN (*brushing the difficulty aside*). Mrs. Metherell won't stand in your way, Elsie.

MRS. METHERELL. Speak for yourself.

AUSTIN. Oh, now I see. You're feeling as I did. It took me by surprise. But I'm converted now, and you'll find

you'll soon grow used to the idea. Once you and I were young ourselves, and——

ELSIE. Father, it's no use talking to Mrs. MethereLL as if she was a reasonable being. It rests with Jack to choose.

JACK. To choose?

ELSIE. Yes. Me or your mother. Which is it to be?

JACK. I—I don't know. (*Glancing shiftily at MRS. METHERELL.*)

MRS. METHERELL (*menacingly*). You'd better know, and sharp.

JACK. She's my mother, Elsie.

ELSIE. Yes. Who comes first? Your mother or the woman you—the woman I used to think you loved.

JACK (*hurt*). Elsie, you know I love you.

ELSIE. Do I? Is it love? Love hasn't widened your horizon. Love should break through, but you can't see beyond your mother for all your love.

AUSTIN (*peace-making*). Elsie, you mustn't ask a man to make a choice like that. These relationships don't clash. They sort themselves out.

ELSIE. That's all you know about it. If you'd been here earlier, you'd have seen the clash all right.

AUSTIN. I didn't see it, but I know you're very capable of looking after yourself.

ELSIE. Oh, I can manage you. And I can manage Jack. You're men, but——

MRS. METHERELL. You can't manage me.

ELSIE (*agreeing*). I've met my match.

AUSTIN (*earnestly*). Elsie, I've set my heart on seeing you happy. My future's black. I see no future for myself at all, but I hoped that this one satisfaction would be granted me. You wanted Jack,

ELSIE. Yes, but——

AUSTIN. Do you still want him?

ELSIE. He's got a mother.

AUSTIN. Never mind her. Do you want him?

ELSIE. Yes. By himself.

AUSTIN. Very well. Metherell, do you want her?

JACK. My mother doesn't want me to want her.

AUSTIN. No. But do you?

JACK. It's like this——

ELSIE. It's no good, father. If wishing could kill Mrs. Metherell, she'd be dead at my feet.

JACK. Elsie!

MRS. METHERELL. Plain speaking breaks no bones. I can give as good as I get.

AUSTIN. May I speak plainly, then? Frankly, don't you think your attitude is selfish. We've all to see our children go from us, or the world would never get on. Let me appeal to you—and I think you will acknowledge that a man of my position is not accustomed to appeal to a woman of—well, you'll admit the difference between us, and the fact that I make very earnestly this petition should——

MRS. METHERELL. Yes. I'll admit the difference between us. You're ruined. I'm not.

AUSTIN (*taken aback*). Ruined!

MRS. METHERELL. Didn't you say so?

AUSTIN (*bitterly*). Yes. I'm ruined.

MRS. METHERELL. You've a family. It's a good lift to a ruined man with a family to get a daughter off his hands. That's why you've come to push her on to us. We mayn't be swells, but we can keep her, and that's more than you can do, so——

AUSTIN (*to JACK*). Metherell, you don't believe that, do you?

JACK (*avoiding MRS. METHERELL'S eye*). No. I think you're sorry you forgot yourself this morning.

AUSTIN. I've done my best to make amends.

JACK. Yes.

AUSTIN. Is it——?

ELSIE. Yes, father. It's impossible.

JACK. Elsie!

ELSIE (*to JACK*). Isn't it impossible?

JACK (*after a pause while he looks from ELSIE to MRS. METHERELL, finally meeting MRS. METHERELL'S eye and bending his head.*) Yes.

(EDMUND knocks and enters without waiting.)

EDMUND. May I come in?

AUSTIN. You here, Edmund!

EDMUND. I came back for Elsie. I've been looking for you everywhere.

MRS. METHERELL. Well, now you've found him, you'd better take him away. I'll be charging some of you rent for the use of my room.

EDMUND. But what's happened?

ELSIE. Oh, you've won.

EDMUND. I've won?

ELSIE. Yes. The old guard. You and Mrs. Metherell.

MRS. METHERELL. Yes. You saw it wouldn't do. You're the only Whitworth in your senses.

EDMUND. Thank you, Mrs. Metherell.

AUSTIN (*cornering EDMUND, anxiously*). You know we lost the match.

EDMUND. Yes. What are you going to do?

AUSTIN. I've not had time to think about myself. This affair came first.

EDMUND. Well, this is where I come in.

AUSTIN (*with a touch of an elder brother's contempt*). What can you do? The club's wound up.

EDMUND. If I like, I can do a good deal. I'm a bachelor with a good city practice, and no expensive hobbies, Austin.

AUSTIN (*bitterly*). I never thought it would come to this. My young brother.

EDMUND. Not so young. Oh, if it stings a bit, perhaps it ought to. You'd the old man's house and the lion's share of his money, and I've got to pull you out of the hole you dug yourself. There's only one person who'll like it less than you, and that's my energetic nephew.

AUSTIN. Leo!

EDMUND. I'll present Master Leo with his articles. The law's a splendid cure for lungs and laziness.

JACK (*approaching EDMUND*). Mr. Whitworth, there's no ill feeling, is there?

EDMUND. Not a bit.

JACK. And Mr. Austin fancies he owes me something.

EDMUND. Oh?

AUSTIN. I have that bribery business badly on my mind.

EDMUND. What do you want, Metherell?

JACK. I'm a man with ambitions, sir, and I heard what you said about Mr. Leo. Would you give me my articles?

EDMUND. My friend, you're an excellent footballer, but you'd make a shocking lawyer with that delicate conscience of yours.

MRS. METHERELL. You'll go on living honestly, Jack.

JACK (*submissively*). Yes, mother.

MRS. METHERELL. And when you marry I'll choose you

a decent hard-working girl who'll look after you properly, and not a butter-fingered lass who'll break your crockery and want waiting on hand and foot and——

EDMUND. Mrs. Metherell !

MRS. METHERELL. Oh, I forgot you were there. I was just talking privately to my son, same as you've been doing amongst yourselves.

EDMUND. We've earned that. I beg your pardon, Mrs. Metherell.

ELSIE. Good-bye, Jack.

JACK (*taking her hand*). Good-bye, Miss Whitworth.

(*ELSIE turns her face away. EDMUND opens door.*)

AUSTIN (*shaking his hand*). Metherell, I'm sorry.

JACK. You did your best to make it right.

(*Exit AUSTIN.*)

EDMUND (*at door*). Elsie.

ELSIE (*going to him*). Yes, uncle ?

EDMUND (*going out with his arm round her*). London !

(*ELSIE smiles gladly at him as they go out. MRS. METHERELL places teapot on table. JACK sits and resumes his tea.*)

CURTAIN.

NOTE.—The “transfer” of a football player from one team to another cannot now be made with the rapidity shown in this play. At the time when “The Game” was written, such a transfer was possible. A year or two earlier, indeed transfers were made at least as quickly as in the play—and one is allowed a certain licence of compression in a play. The instance in point is recorded in the “World’s Work” for September, 1912, In an article entitled, “Is Football a Business ?”

Mr. J. J. Bentley, ex-president and life member of the Football League, tells how he effected the transfer of a player named Charles Roberts from Grimsby to Manchester United on a Friday night, the player being at Grimsby, and Mr. Bentley in London. The matter was settled by telephone at midnight, and in sixteen hours after signing Roberts appeared in the Manchester United Colours.

THE NORTHERNERS
A DRAMA OF THE EIGHTEEN-TWENTIES

THE NORTHERNERS

A DRAMA OF THE EIGHTEEN-TWENTIES

CHARACTERS.

EPHRAIM BARLOW }
JOHN HEPPENSTALL } *Factory Owners.*

GUY BARLOW, *Ephraim's son.*

CAPTAIN LASCELLES.

MATTHEW BUTTERWORTH }
MARTIN KELSALL }
JOSEPH HEALEY } *Weavers.*
HENRI CALLARD }

MAN-SERVANT *in Barlow's House.*

MARY BUTTERWORTH, *Matthew's wife.*

RUTH BUTTERWORTH, *his daughter.*

The SCENE is laid in Lancashire in 1820.

ACT I. *Evening in Matt Butterworth's Cottage.*

ACT II.—*An evening six months later in Ephraim Barlow's house.*

ACT III.—*The next night. A quarry on the moors.*

ACT IV.—*Later the same night in Ephraim Barlow's house.*

ACT I.

Interior of MATTHEW BUTTERWORTH'S cottage. The room has three doors, one leading directly outside, one to the lean-to shed which holds the hand-loom, the third to the stairs. The cottage is that of a prosperous artisan of 1820, and the general standard of comfort little higher than that of a modern slum. The room is in darkness and through the door is heard the monotonous clickety-clackety of a handloom. A brisk knock is heard at the front door, and as MARY BUTTERWORTH opens the door L., carrying a dip candle in an iron candlestick, the sound of the loom increases. She crosses, leaving candle on table and opens the front door. Outside are JOSEPH HEALEY, MARTIN KELSALL and HENRI CALLARD.

MARY is fifty, dressed in a dark dress of linsey woolsey, with neckerchief of indigo blue printed cotton over her shoulders and a full apron of blue-and-white check round her waist. The men who enter are all obviously poorer. JOE HEALEY, the oldest of them, for instance, hopes in vain by buttoning high his waistcoat to hide the absence of a shirt. All wear clogs, breeches and coats more or less ragged and patched. MARTIN is twenty-four, thin to emaciation, but handsome and fervent. HENRI carries himself well, wears his rags gallantly and his clothes are lighter coloured.

JOE (*as MARY opens door*). Is Matthew in, Mrs. Butterworth?

MARY (*without standing from door*). Yes. You'll hear his loom if you hearken.

JOE. It's a sound that isn't often heard outside the factory nowadays.

MARY. It's one that isn't often hushed in here. Matthew's busy.

HENRI (*half entering. MARY gives back*). Too busy to see us, Madame Butterworth?

JOE (*entering and speaking importantly*). Tell him the Friends of the People are here to see him on the people's business.

(HENRI and MARTIN enter, MARTIN closing the door.)

MARY (*raising the candle to their faces*). I know you. I know you all. You, Joe Healey and young Martin Keelall, and you—you're the Frenchman.

HENRI (*bowing*). I am the Frenchman, madame.

MARY (*replacing the candle, disgustedly*). Radicals, the three of you.

JOE (*reprovingly*). We are Friends of the People.

MARY. Yes. Friends of yourselves.

JOE. Yes, of ourselves and of you and of Matthew there. We are the people.

MARY (*militantly*). You're Radicals. And my Matthew's not a redcap like that Frenchie there that's fled his country to come disturbing quiet English folk with his nonsense.

HENRI. I left my country when the Bourbons entered it again. (*Rhetorically.*) The blood I'd shed for freedom—

JOE (*interrupting*). We'll talk to Matthew about all that.

MARY (*standing, barring the door*). You will not talk to

MATTHEW. I'll not have my man made a Radical, and run his head into a noose for the sake of——

MARTIN (*quietly*). For the sake of freedom.

MARY. We're free enough.

HENRI. You are free to starve. To be slaves of the cotton masters, who treat you worse than any grand seigneur would have treated his peasants under the Bourbons.

MARY (*dryly*). Well, Matthew's busy.

JOE. He's not too busy to attend to us. We want him out.

MARY. And you'll not get him.

JOE. I think we shall. (*Calling.*) Matthew! Matthew Butterworth!

MARY. Yes, you may call. You'll burst your lungs before he'll hear in there. He's working. You're idling. Don't try to interrupt a better man.

(HENRI makes as if to force her from door, JOE checks him.)

JOE. That's why we want him with us. Because we know him for the best weaver in these parts. Because he's treated by the master different from us and works at home instead of being driven into the factory. We want the best man on the people's side and none of us but gives old Matthew best. That's what we think of your husband, Mrs. Butterworth.

MARY. And it's what I think, so you needn't fancy that it's news to me. He's better sense than to go wasting time on a pack of crazy Radicals.

(The loom stops, the door is thrown open and MATTHEW speaks off.)

MATTHEW. Mary, fetch that candle back. I cannot see to weave properly with only one.

JOE. Let your loom be, Matthew, and come here. We've need of you.

(MATTHEW enters in his shirt sleeves, stout waistcoat and breeches. He is a man of sixty, solidly built with square face and grey hair, bowed with bending to his loom.)

MATTHEW. What's the to-do about?

MARY (holding his arm). They've come to trap you, Matthew.

MATTHEW. Trap me? They'll be wide awake.

MARY. Don't listen to them, Matt. They're Radicals.

JOE. We're Reformers. You know us, Matthew.

MATTHEW. Aye, I know you. You, Martin! You become a Radical?

MARTIN. Empty bellies make Radicals, Mr. Butterworth. Empty bellies and the Corn Tax and bread at thirteence the quatern loaf.

MATTHEW. Empty bellies make fools then. I can hear you've picked up the Radical cant. What do you want with me?

JOE. We've come to reason with you, Matthew.

MARY. Oh, if you're going to listen to them, I'll sit in yonder.

MATTHEW (*sharply*). Don't touch the loom, now.

(Exit MARY.)

Well, what is it? I haven't time to spend on argument.

HENRI. Then give us your advice, Mr. Butterworth, your help.

MATTHEW. I'm not a politician.

(MARTIN sits wearily on settle.)

JOE. Maybe you're not. But you're a man. And you

know how things are with us. They're different with you.

MATTHEW. And why?

HENRI. Because you're the favourite of Mr. Barlow.

MATTHEW. If you weren't an ignorant Frenchman you'd suffer for those words. I'm not a favourite. It isn't me. It's my work. There's never been a yard of faulty cloth made on my loom. It's good. It's the honest work of a man that takes a pride in making it good, not like your rotten machine-made muck that's turned out at the factory. That's why Mr. Barlow sends me yarn to weave. He gets his special price for the cloth I weave and he knows it pays to let me weave it. That's not making a favourite of me. It's business.

JOE (*quietly*). It's making an exception of you, Matthew. You're working all the hours God sends, but you're drawing good money every week and you're living in comfort with your missus and your daughter both at home. My girls are in the factory and the wages of the lot of us don't keep the cold and hunger from our door.

MATTHEW. What else do you expect but distress when you've let them get machines to do the work of men? It's Arkwright's spinning frames and Watt's steam engines that take the bread from your mouths. It isn't Barlow's, nor Heppenstall's, nor Whitworth's over the hill, nor Mottershead's, nor any of the manufacturers. It's steel and iron that have got you down, and more fools you for letting them.

HENRI. You talk like one of us already.

MATTHEW. Aye? Only I'm not one of you.

JOE. Is it our fault? We can't all weave like you. We're not all master craftsmen with looms of our own and no debts hanging round our necks. The machines are there. We can't get beyond it.

HENRI. We can break the machines.

MATTHEW (*sharply*). No violence. Violence never did anybody good.

HENRI. We did no good in France until we took the Bastille.

MATTHEW. And did that do any good? You're here, in exile, because your countrymen forgot the Bastille and welcomed Louis Bourbon back.

JOE (*soberly*). I'm against violence myself till all else fails. That what we want of you, Matt. Help us to escape violence.

MATT. What help?

JOE. Will you go to London?

MATT. London?

JOE. Yes. (*Very earnestly.*) They don't know there. They cannot know or else they wouldn't let things go on and let poor weavers starve. Eight shillings have I taken from the factory this week. Eight shillings and the loaf at thirteence! We want to tell the Government we're starving while the masters stink of brass. Wages must go higher or taxes lower. They must do something.

MATTHEW. Why should I go? I'm not a factory hand.

HENRI. That's why they'll listen to a word from you. We'll go too, some of us, but there's little use in that because we're known to be reformers. There are Government spies in every Democratic Club. You can hardly trust your nearest friend. The spies are everywhere.

MATTHEW. How do you make out they don't know about us, then?

JOE. They can't. Even Parliament men aren't fiends from Hell.

MATTHEW. It's no good going to London. Think of the March of the Blanketeers.

JOE. Think of it! Wasn't I one of them? One of the thousands who met on Ardwick Green, and the hundreds that met the Yeomanry at Stockport, and the tens that struggled through to Macclesfield?

MATTHEW (*scornfully*). Yes. You got as far as Macclesfield. Do you think they'll let you get to London to tell them? Do you think they *want* to know? And if they do get there, and tell them, the manufacturers will be there first telling them another tale, and whose tale do you think they'll believe? Yours or theirs? Going to London's a fool's errand. They *do* know and they don't care. They're South, we're North, and what the eye doesn't see the heart doesn't grieve at. You made your beds, when you let Arkwright set up his machinery, and you've to lie on them.

MARTIN (*rising dejectedly*). God help the poor!

HENRI (*turning fiercely on him*). God helps those that help themselves. I'll hear you weavers sing the Marseillaise before I die.

JOE (*to MATTHEW*). You're against violence and you're against politics. What *do* you favour?

MATTHEW (*grimly*). I favour work and I favour my loom, and if you've said your say I'll be getting back to it.

JOE. Aye, that's the old story. Work, and every man for himself and his hand against his neighbour, while the masters join to keep us down.

MATTHEW. I've something else to do than falling out with my bread and cheese. I'm not a politician, I'm a weaver, and I've not got time for two jobs. I'm not a Republican neither. I throw the shuttle and I don't throw stones.

HENRI. Coward. It is because you do not dare.

MATTHEW (*contemptuously*). It's well for you you're French and it's known you'd break if an Englishman touched you with his hand.

JOE. It's well for you you're prosperous with your loom at home and your women at home and your daughter dressed like——

(*Enter RUTH BUTTERWORTH by the front door. She is twenty-one, dark, passionate, tall, in a plain, narrow-skirted, short-sleeved gown of woolsey, with a bright-coloured cotton handkerchief crossed over the bust and tied at the back of the short waist, dress low at the neck, straw bonnet and boots.*)

—like she is. (*Preparing to go.*) I'm grieved we've failed to move you, but you're better off than us, and it's the skill of your hands you have to thank for it. Machinery has played the very hangment with the rest of us. Good-night, Matt.

MATTHEW. Good-night, Joe Healey. (*They shake, MATTHEW looks contemptuously at HENRI.*) Take your Republican with you. I've a word in season to say to young Martin Kelsall.

(*Exeunt JOE and HENRI. RUTH stands by settle.*)

Now, my lad, you came here to see me a week ago.

MARTIN (*looking guiltily at RUTH, who shows surprise*). Yes, Mr. Butterworth.

MATTHEW. You said nowt about being a Radical then.

MARTIN. I came on other business.

MATTHEW. And you said nowt about starving bellies. If you can't make brass enough to fill one belly, you'll be hard put to it to fill two.

RUTH. That's all over, father.

MATTHEW. Is it? Did he speak to you?

RUTH. Yes. I told him "no."

MARTIN (*to RUTH*). Have I no chance?

MATTHEW. A chance of what? Of taking Ruth from here, where she's all a woman wants, and making her starve alongside of you and expecting her to go into the factory to help you to make a livelihood. My daughter's not for your sort, my lad.

RUTH. I told him that.

MARTIN. Yes, you told me, but I haven't finished hoping yet.

MATTHEW. If you're hoping for a wife to work for you, you've come to the wrong shop this time.

MARTIN. You're a proud man, Mr. Butterworth, and, Ruth, you're proud and all. I'm just a weaver lad that loves you and 'ud work till I drop for you. And maybe you'll find out your mistake some day. Proud you may be and proud you are, but if you're not above taking a warning from me, you'll be careful where you walk o' nights. There's company that's dangerous for you.

MATTHEW (*suspiciously*). What's that?

RUTH (*quickly*). Who cares what a man says when he's sent about his business?

MATTHEW. You're right there, lass. It's not for me to take notice of his words.

MARTIN. Then take notice of this, Ruth. I love you. I always shall. No matter what happens, I always shall. And I'm a patient man. I'm used to waiting.

RUTH. You'll be more used to it if you're going to wait for me.

MARTIN (*doggedly*). I'm going to wait.

MATTHEW (*opening the door, grimly*). Good-night to you.
(*Slight pause, then MARTIN moves to door.*)

MARTIN (*going*). Good-night.

(*Exit MARTIN.*)

MATTHEW. I'll be getting back to my loom. I've wasted too much time to-night.

(*Exit MATTHEW. The sound of the loom is heard, and, immediately she hears it, RUTH opens the front door and calls.*)

RUTH. Martin! Martin, come back a minute.

(*After a moment MARTIN re-enters.*)

MARTIN. You want me?

RUTH. I want to speak to you before you go.

MARTIN (*advancing*). Ruth!

RUTH. No. Don't mistake me. I haven't changed my mind, but I want you to understand. Just now, you tried to warn me.

MARTIN. Yes? I warn you again. It isn't safe.

RUTH. You mean Guy Barlow?

MARTIN. Yes, you know I mean Guy Barlow.

RUTH. That's what I wanted to be certain of. I wanted you to know that what I do is done with open eyes.

MARTIN. You're playing with fire.

RUTH. It won't be me that's burnt. I've got my purpose clear and strong before me, Martin. It's you put this thing in my mind and I'm going through with it for your sake.

MARTIN. For my sake! A lot you care for me.

RUTH. That's neither here nor there.

MARTIN. No more than a month ago I'd have broken the jaw of any man that said you weren't my wench. We hadn't spoke it out to each other, but I thought it was that sure it didn't need the speaking. And then you changed and I found out what changed you. So I thought I'd save you

if I could. I asked you, and you said "No." I asked your father and I got my answer to-night. And now, you'll go your way, the woman I love. God knows what's changed you, but——

RUTH. Nothing has changed me, Martin.

MARTIN. Then marry me.

RUTH. No.

MARTIN. You don't love me.

RUTH. I haven't said I did.

MARTIN. Yes, you have. Not in words, I grant you, but if looks mean anything you've told it me a hundred times. Do you think he'll marry you? He won't. Marriage is not what Guy Barlow wants. I could tell you tales——

RUTH. You needn't. I'll make him marry me.

MARTIN. He didn't marry the others.

RUTH. Had they my beauty?

MARTIN. Beauty! Yes, you're beautiful. By God, you are.

RUTH. I've the gift of beauty, Martin, and I'm going to use it.

MARTIN. Because he's rich, and I'm poor.

RUTH. No, because he's powerful over others and I want power over him. When you and I have gone our walks and been together on the moors, did we talk of nothing but the stars? You told me dreams, dreams of all the things you'd do if some great god gave you the power. It's I shall have that power, Martin, and use it in the way you taught me. Your thoughts, your dreams—and my pretty face gives me the chance to take your dreams and make them live. That's what I'm going to do.

MARTIN. It's nothing but another dream.

RUTH. It's real this time, Martin.

MARTIN. But we did talk of the stars sometimes, and of ourselves and——

RUTH. That was the dream. That was happiness.

MARTIN. Why shouldn't we be happy? It's a crime to throw yourself away on him for the sake of us.

RUTH. No, it's a crusade. I hope we shall be happy, but not together, Martin. I shan't do it all in a day, even after he has married me, but I shall manage him in time, and all this misery shall cease. You do believe I shall, don't you, Martin? You do approve?

MARTIN (*after a pause*). God give you strength.

RUTH. I think He will. You understand now, Martin?

MARTIN. I understand. (*Slight pause.*) Ruth, are you sure?

RUTH (*calmly*). I'm going through with it. Good-night, Martin.

MARTIN (*approaching her, then backing as she gives no encouragement*). Good-night, Ruth.

(*Exit MARTIN. RUTH closes the door, then takes off her hat as MARY enters.*)

MARY (*sourly*). So you've come in. And where have you been?

RUTH. Out.

MARY. You've a fancy for going out o' nights.

RUTH. I suppose I'm old enough to please myself when I go out.

MARY. I suppose you think you are. Times are changed since I was young. I'd have got the rolling-pin at my head if I'd answered your grandmother back the way you answer me. I'd never any time for going out at nights. Too busy

spinning. (*She busies herself getting out crockery, etc., putting it on table without cloth.*)

RUTH. Machines spin now.

MARY. And women and children watch the machines. But of course I mustn't say owt of that. Send you to the factory and I'd know where to put my hand on you. But no. What's good enough for others isn't good enough for you.

RUTH. They're fitted for the factory.

MARY. And what are you fitted for? Nowt, but to fancy yourself a fine lady. I know if I was your father, I'd have you working for the bread you eat and the clothes you wear, like every other girl about. But he's got his way and made an idler of you.

RUTH. Perhaps he's right.

MARY. It's not my way of bringing up a girl.

RUTH. Never mind, mother. I'll be surprising you one of these days.

MARY. Yes. You're always in the right. You're like your father. Got stiff neck with pride.

RUTH. Maybe, I've cause for pride.

MARY. And maybe you haven't, and all, and if you have I've never seen cause for it.

RUTH. You shall do very soon.

MARY. You're hiding something.

RUTH. It won't be hidden long.

MARY. What is it now? Out with it, lass.

RUTH. Not yet, mother. I'll tell you when there's anything to tell.

(*A knock is heard. MARY opens door after momentary surprise. Outside are EPHRAIM and GUY BARLOW.*

EPHRAIM is a man of about sixty, well covered with flesh,

clean-shaven, grey, square in the face, but not too strong of feature, wearing a short-bodied, long-tailed bottle-green coat, with breeches to match, buff waistcoat, ruffled shirt frill, low-crowned black beaver hat with narrow curly rim, and thick drab top-coat, long in the skirt and with a huge collar. GUY is twenty-eight, with fair hair and a stronger face than his father. He is clean-shaven and his clothes more fashionable and of finer material than the stout durable cloth EPHRAIM prefers. He has trousers instead of knee breeches.)

EPHRAIM. Is this Matt Butterworth's ?

MARY. Surely, Mr. Barlow. Will you step inside ?
(*Holding door open.*)

EPHRAIM (*entering*). It's what I came to do.

(*GUY follows. MARY closes door.*)

That'll be Matt at his loom ?

MARY. Yes. I'll bring him to you. (*Crosses, opens door.*)
Matt, here's the master.

MATTHEW (*entering, putting on his coat*). The master !

EPHRAIM. Good evening, Matt.

MATTHEW. You'll sit down, won't you ?

EPHRAIM. Thanks.

MATTHEW. And you too, Mr. Guy.

GUY. Thank you.

MATT. Well, I'm glad to see you here, and if so be as bread and cheese and ale are not beneath you, there's enough for all.

EPHRAIM (*half heartedly*). Well, thankee, Matt Butterworth——

GUY (*interrupting*). No. It's business brings us here,

not eating. (*To MATTHEW.*) My father has something to say to you.

(*At a glance from MATTHEW, MARY and RUTH go out.*)

EPHRAIM. Yes, I thought I'd come and tell you here instead of sending for you up to factory.

MATTHEW (*grimly*). It's as well you did come. You'd not have got me there by sending. I've never entered factory gate and never will.

EPHRAIM (*good-naturedly*). You're a pig-headed old stick in-the-mud, Matt. You won't move with the times.

MATTHEW. Not when the times move to factories.

EPHRAIM. Well, well, you're an obstinate fellow. What's wrong with factories?

MATTHEW. What isn't wrong? They're bits of hell spewed up on earth.

GUY. You'd better keep a civil tongue in your head.

MATTHEW. I'm talking to your father, Mr. Guy, and we've known each other long enough to speak what's in our minds. You're a young man and the young get used to changes quickly. You find machines a natural state of things. I'll tell you how things were before the factories came and progress got a hold over everything. I'd open yon door in a morning and I'd see children playing in the fields. Where are the children now? Driven into your factory at five in the morning pretty nigh as soon as they can walk and thrashed with a cane to keep the poor little devils awake when all the nature in them's crying out for sleep. I'd go into a neighbour's cottage and I'd see a loom with a warp on it and a weaver taking pride in his work. You've taken the work away from men and given it to machines. And the worst is the machines don't care. You send out miles

of cloth for every inch we used to weave, and every yard you send as full of faults as an egg of meat. It's that you've done with your factories, young sir. You've broken the weaver's spirit and you've killed the joy he used to take in honest craftsmanship. It's quality that used to count and a man 'ud think shame to himself to produce a cloth that's full of weaving faults. There are no weavers now. They're servants of a steam engine.

GUY. I'm sorry it upsets you, Mr. Butterworth, but facts are too much for you. Hand looms are played out.

MATTHEW (*intensely convinced*). Never, while good workmanship endures. If they want the best, they'll come to the handloom weaver for it.

GUY. Yes, but you see they don't want the best.

MATTHEW. They want designs that a man conceives in joy and executes with pride. They want a cloth that shows he's taken pride in making it, and knows it's his design and not a copy of another's.

GUY. We can sell a hundred pieces of the same design with as little trouble as your one.

MATTHEW. And which 'ull wear longest?

GUY. We don't want cloth to wear, we want it to sell.

MATTHEW (*dismissing him, sadly*). Mr. Guy, it's a hard thing to say of your father's son, but I've a fear you're a godless youth. (*To EPHRAIM.*) What was it you wanted of me, Mr. Barlow?

EPHRAIM (*awkwardly*). You've made it rather hard to tell you that. I didn't know you thought so badly of the factories. (*Turning.*) Guy, I think, perhaps——

GUY (*curtly*). No. If you won't speak out, I will.

(*Slight pause. Then EPHRAIM gives GUY leave by a glance.*)

We want you to come into the factory, Butterworth.

MATTHEW (*startled*). I ? In factory ?

GUY. Yes.

MATTHEW. But——

GUY. You're the last man on our pay-sheets working out. We must have uniformity. We want you in.

MATTHEW. *You* want me, Mr. Guy. I can see who 'tis I have to thank for this. It's you that have brought the old master here to stand by while you say these things to me.

GUY. Well, as it happened, you're so far wrong that I'd no intention of coming in at all, only I was going home from a walk (*glancing away, as if after RUTH*), and met him on his way here.

MATTHEW (*to EPHRAIM*). Mr. Barlow, it isn't *your* wish that I——

EPHRAIM. Well, Matt, we've had complaints. (*Querulously.*) Weavers nowadays are a grumbling, discontented lot, and——

MATTHEW. Aye. *Power*-loom weavers are, and have cause to be. Before you started factories folk could save. It was a saying here that every man in the valley owned his own house and the one next door to it.

EPHRAIM. They complain I make a favourite of you, and, as Guy says, we must have uniformity. It's just a point of discipline.

MATTHEW. Yes, I know what discipline means. Discipline means ringing them into your factory at five in the morning and out at seven in the evening, and uniformity means fifty looms in rows all tied to a steam engine and every loom weaving the same pattern.

GUY. Look here, Butterworth, you were working when we came in. Working at nine o'clock at night.

MATTHEW. Do I complain of that ? Not me. I can

please myself what hours I work. It's nowt to me what time the engine stops. My engine's here. (*Indicating his arms.*)

GUY. Yes, and because it is, you never let it rest. Come into the factory and you've finished at seven.

MATTHEW. I'm *sent* away at seven. I'm under orders. I'm my own master here, Mr. Guy, and have been all my life. If I want to work, I work, and if I want to play, I play, and there's nobody to stop me, whether it's tramping over the moors getting my mind choke full of the new designs that come to me when I'm walking through the green, resting my eyes, or whether it's a cock-fight and a bellyful of ale—and you've no need to look shocked neither, Mr. Barlow, for I've seen time afore you got meddling with machines when you went cock-fighting yourself, and you weren't too big in those days to drink with me, too. And now you're telling me to come and weave in factory.

EPHRAIM. Oh, nay, Matt, I'm not.

MATTHEW. Well, I don't know. You've stood there and heard him tell me I'm to come in.

EPHRAIM. But not as weaver, Matt.

MATTHEW. What then?

EPHRAIM. As overlooker, and not a man in Lancashire that's better fitted for it.

MATTHEW (*soberly weighing it*). Aye. That's no more than truth.

EPHRAIM. I'm not flattering. I'm a business man, and I'm choosing the best man for the job.

MATTHEW. And I'm refusing it, for I'm a business man and I've got a better job. I've an old loom in yonder and as long as she hangs together I'll go on weaving cloth as cloth should be woven, by the skilful hand of a man to designs of his own contriving. To hell with uniformity. There's

beauty in a loom and nowt but beastly ugliness in a row of looms.

GUY (*coldly*). Where do you get your yarn from, Butterworth?

MATTHEW. Why, from you.

GUY. And you've been selling your cloth to us?

MATTHEW. Yes.

GUY. We can take no more.

MATTHEW (*staggered*). You can't take my cloth, my beautiful cloth?

EPHRAIM (*with sympathy*). It's true, Matt. Good cloth means a good price and people won't pay it.

MATTHEW. It's your fault, then. That's what you've brought them to. You've spoilt them with your factory rubbish.

GUY. They want cheap cloth. We provide it. Yours is dear. We can't sell it.

MATTHEW. Then I'll sell my own. I'll find buyers.

EPHRAIM. It's no use, Matt. Take my word for it, there are no customers to-day for cloth like yours. What between paying the country's bill for licking Bonaparte and power looms for silk and linen there's no demand for cotton cloth of your quality.

GUY. And you'll get no more yarn from us.

MATTHEW. You're not the only ones.

GUY. Nor from others. We're going to make an end of the whole breed of hand-loom weavers.

MATTHEW. We'll not be ended easy.

GUY. We want you in the factories. The factories are hungering for the right men.

MATTHEW. And men are hungry because of the factories. Don't tell me my cloth won't sell. It's cloth that sells itself.

EPHRAIM. Don't you believe me, Matt ?

MATTHEW. I don't believe you know what my cloth's like. Do you see it yourself up yonder ?

EPHRAIM. Well—no.

MATTHEW (*going to door*). Then come in here and I'll show you. You'll not be telling me then there are no decent housewives left to buy a cloth like mine. (*Exit.*)

GUY (*to EPHRAIM, who is following*). Oh, what's the good of wasting time on him ?

EPHRAIM. Best humour him, Guy. Don't come. I'll get him round.

GUY. Psh ! You're too soft with the old fool.

EPHRAIM. And you're too hard. Matt and I were friends before you were born.

(*Exit EPHRAIM. GUY moves impatiently, then sits on table.*)

Enter RUTH.)

RUTH (*surprised and not cordial*). I thought you'd gone. I heard no voices.

GUY. I schemed to get them into there. Do you think I'd go without a word with you ? (*Approaching her.*)

RUTH (*coldly, holding him at arm's length*). We've parted once to-night. What do you want with me ?

GUY. I want everything except to part again. You witch, what have you done to me ? I haven't a nerve but tingles for the touch of you. I'm all burnt up. The night's a tossing fever, and the day's a cruel nightmare till evening comes and brings me sight of you.

RUTH (*backing*). Don't touch me, please.

GUY. How long am I to hold myself in leash ? It's more than flesh and blood can stand. My God, I wonder if you know how beautiful you are.

RUTH. I have a mirror in my room.

GUY. I'm jealous of that mirror, Ruth. Jealous of a piece of glass because it sees you every day.

RUTH. You've seen me every evening for a month.

GUY. And I'm no farther than when we began. You're hot and cold by turn. You lead me on and thrust me off. You play with me. To-night you said you wouldn't walk with me to-morrow.

RUTH. And time I did. I've walked with you too much. A change of company is good.

GUY (*startled*). Company? What company?

RUTH (*dryly*). My mother's. You say you're where you were when we begun. Perhaps you are. But I am not. It's no new thing for you to go your walks with a weaver's lass. But it's new for me to be the lass. Do you think there are no wagging tongues about?

GUY. It's news to me that you give heed to gossip. You're not going to talk about your reputation, are you?

RUTH. No. I shan't *talk* about it, Guy.

GUY (*scornfully*). I thought you made of finer stuff.

RUTH. Than those others you have walked with?

GUY (*sharply*). What's that to do with you?

RUTH. Nothing, but that I find it good to know about them.

GUY. This is strange talk for a woman.

RUTH (*dryly*). Folk always say I should have been a man.

GUY (*ardently*). Thank God, you're not. It's better to rule a man than be one, Ruth.

RUTH. Do I rule you?

GUY. You've made a slave of me. I'm at your feet.

RUTH. You told the others that.

GUY. Had they your beauty?

RUTH. Then I've the greater cause to guard it.

GUY. You haven't talked like this outside.

RUTH. I'm inside now. This is my father's cottage.

GUY. You've been like this to-night. Perverse. As if you didn't know what passion meant. As if you laughed at me for being on fire for you. You've come half-way to meet me till to-night. You've answered love with love. You've been a fine free glory of a woman that it was heaven to be near and hell to be away from, that knew to be in love was to be upraised above the talk of fools and what a pair of lovers do is right because they do it for their love.

RUTH (*absently*). Yes. What lovers do is right even if it's to renounce.

GUY. Renounce? What are you talking about?

RUTH. I was thinking of a pair of lovers that I know.

GUY (*roughly*). Then stop thinking of them. Think of us.

RUTH. I'm thinking of myself.

GUY. You're in a curious mood to-night.

RUTH. To-night I'm being prudent.

GUY (*scornfully*). Prudent! Love isn't prudent. Prudence was made for cowards, not for lovers. Ruth, you're not a coward.

RUTH (*absently*). I think that what I'm doing now is the bravest thing I ever did. (*At him.*) What do you make of it all?

GUY (*trying to be light*). I think you're a mischievous tease, and——

RUTH. I'm quite in earnest. I was in earnest when I let you talk to me of love and still in earnest when I told you I could walk with you no more.

GUY. Ruth! You didn't mean it?

RUTH. I meant it all. Did you?

GUY (*surprised*). Did I?

RUTH. About your love.

GUY. Why should you doubt me, Ruth?

RUTH. I'll tell you. Because in all your talk of love, you have used a lot of words, but there is one word that you haven't spoken yet, and that I'd like to hear before I go my walks with you again.

GUY. What word?

RUTH. Marriage.

GUY (*staggered, then recovering*). Marriage! Well, isn't it early days for that?

RUTH. With some men and some women it would be over early. When you're the man and I the woman, it isn't early.

GUY. Marriage! There's a directness about you.

RUTH (*simply*). Yes, there is.

GUY. I'm taken by surprise, but——

RUTH (*quietly*). Are you?

GUY. I've been too busy simply loving you to think of marriage. (*Quickly*.) Yes, Ruth, of course we're going to be married. It would be monstrous in me ever to have intended anything else. But—er—you know, there's my father. We shall have to keep the marriage secret. Just the clergyman and no witnesses to make quite sure of secrecy.

RUTH (*moving to door as if leaving him and opening it*). Good-bye, Mr. Barlow.

GUY (*staring at her*). Ruth!

RUTH. Good-bye. Yes. Look at me well. It's your last look at close quarters.

GUY (*by her*). No, by Heaven, it's not.

RUTH (*still holding the door open*). You've told me much about my beauty. You hold my beauty cheap.

GUY. Your beauty is the richest, finest thing in all the world.

RUTH. A secret marriage!

GUY. What's changed you, Ruth? You've shown yourself to me a soft and yielding woman. To-night, you're hard, suspicious.

RUTH (*closing door*). To-night, I mean to strike a bargain with you.

GUY. Lovers don't talk of bargains.

RUTH. There's always time to talk of love. To-night, we'll talk of marriage, if you please.

GUY. You mean to be wilful.

RUTH. I mean that if you want me there's a price to pay, and a secret marriage by a puppet priest with no witnesses is too low a price for me.

GUY (*blustering*). You thought that!

RUTH (*calmly*). Wasn't I right? How badly do you want me, Mr. Guy Barlow? You see me, and you know the price.

GUY (*quite shocked*). You didn't talk this way outside. You've made it all so ugly. You've taken all romance away.

RUTH. Romance is safe for men. It's dangerous for women. You tell me I was soft and yielding. What if I'd been too soft, and yielded further than I should? You'd still have life, and life would still be beautiful for you and you'd be looking for another woman with a pretty face to make love beautifully with you. But I'd be dead. I should have killed myself and you'd forget me in a little while.

GUY (*genuinely moved*). Ruth, stop! I'm not a black-guard.

RUTH. I'm hoping not, if I'm to be your wife.

GUY. I never meant you harm. I simply didn't think.

RUTH. You thought fast enough of a secret marriage. You remembered to be prudent, and prudence, as I think you said, is made for cowards, not for lovers. Are you a coward, Mr. Guy?

GUY. I'm a lover, Ruth. Will you be my wife?

RUTH (*with slight shudder*). Yes.

GUY (*holding her*). I've got you now.

RUTH. Yes. For better or for worse, you've got me now.

GUY. For better than the best. I never knew till I met you what love could do to a man. Ruth, you won't remember what you fancied that I thought to-night? You won't have that against me? It really wasn't so.

RUTH. I have only room for one thought now. I remember that you're going to marry me.

GUY (*lightly*). In a precious few days, you'll remember that I have married you. I'm not cut out for waiting.

RUTH. I shall not keep you waiting.

(*Enter EPHRAIM and MATTHEW.*)

EPHRAIM. Well, that's settled now, Matt.

MATTHEW (*like a beaten man*). Yes, it's settled. I'll be at factory come five to-morrow morning.

GUY. That's good.

MATTHEW. Is it? I'll tell you this much, Mr. Barlow, it's a bad night's work you've done.

GUY. If you're talking to me, it's the best night's work I've ever done.

MATTHEW (*morosely*). I was talking to your father.

EPHRAIM. Well, well, we must agree to differ.

MATTHEW. And it won't be the last of our differences,

neither. It's my punishment, this is. I've been a proud man and I'm humbled. Some weaver lads come here this very night asking me to join in with them.

EPHRAIM. Join? In what?

MATTHEW. Ah, well, I'll leave you to guess in what. I sent them off with a good big flea in their ear: told them a hand-loom weaver had nowt to do with their sort. I've everything to do with their sort now. I'm one of them, and if they have owt to say, or do against you and your ways, I'll say and do it with them. You've made a Radical to-night.

EPHRAIM. Now, Matt, don't try to threaten me. We've met as friends too often in the days gone by for that.

MATTHEW. Yes, before you started getting up in the world by climbing on other men's shoulders.

EPHRAIM. And if you'll let me, we'll go on being friends.

RUTH. Of course you will. Now more than ever.

MATTHEW (*roughly*). You don't know what you're talking about, lass.

RUTH. Tell them, Guy.

EPHRAIM. Guy?

GUY. Mr. Butterworth, you and my father must be friends, because I'm going to marry Ruth.

MATTHEW. What's that?

RUTH. Yes, father, it's true.

MATTHEW (*excitedly calling and opening door*). Here, Mary! Mary, where are you?

(*Enter MARY.*)

Here's our Ruth going to wed the young master. What do you say to that?

MARY (*judicially*). I say the young master's doing well for himself.

EPHRAIM (*sourly*). Nobody asks what I think.

GUY. That'll be all right, father.

EPHRAIM. Will it?

GUY. Oh, I'll tell you about it walking home. You've Mr. Butterworth's hand to shake.

EPHRAIM (*dryly*). It just depends if he's still a Radical.

MATTHEW. Me? I'm a maze. I don't know what I am.

EPHRAIM (*genially smiling*). I'll chance it then. (*They shake.*) Good night, Matt. (*Genially.*) Good night.

GUY. To-morrow, Ruth.

RUTH. Yes, Guy, to-morrow.

(*Exeunt EPHRAIM and GUY.*)

MARY (*going to RUTH as if to kiss her*). Well, lass, you said you'd surprise us. You have and all. Biggest surprise I ever had. Wedding the young master. Something like a match now this is.

RUTH. Don't, mother. I'm so ashamed.

MARY. Ashamed? Where's the shame in getting wed? We all come to it.

MATTHEW. And you've come to it rare and well. And me thinking in yonder while Mr. Barlow talked to me I'd have small cause now to send young Kelsall off, for I'm a factory hand myself the same as he.

RUTH. Poor Martin Kelsall.

MATTHEW. Aye, poor he is and rich you're going to be. You've little need to think of Kelsall now.

RUTH. No. I mustn't think of Martin now. I'm doing what I meant to do. I've got Guy Barlow.

MARY. Ruth, there'll be a lot of sewing to be done.

RUTH. Why?

MARY. Why? The girl's a-dream. Against your wedding to be sure. What else are you thinking of?

RUTH. It's not my wedding that I'm thinking of. It's afterwards. Well, I've begun. I'm going to see it through.

(RUTH stares straight out, as into the future. The others are looking at her.)

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

(Six months later. Interior of BARLOW'S house at night. Doors on each side of the room, window, covered by drawn chintz curtains, at the back. Dark panelled walls. Polished oak floor with squares of carpet, dark mahogany furniture, square table. Centre with four chairs, chairs by fireplace and under window; right, basket-grate with high steel fender and hand-irons. Bright fire.)

RUTH, her whole appearance suggesting physical well-being, sits by fire reading by the light of four candles on table. She is well dressed in sober colours. A manservant opens door and MARY enters, dressed as Act I, with a heavy cloak, mittens, etc., suggesting winter. The servant goes, closing the door.)

RUTH (*rising*). Well, mother.

MARY (*kissing her*). You're warm in here.

RUTH. We need to be.

MARY. It's bitter cold to-night.

(RUTH pulls chair from table and sits, putting MARY in her own chair. MARY looks scornfully at the book placed on table.)

Reading, were you? Well, one way of idling's as bad as another and reading never did anybody good that ever I heard of. That's what your father's always doing with his spare time now. Tom Paine's *Rights of Man* and *The*

Age of Reason. Stuffing his old head with all manner of new-fangled politics.

RUTH. But this isn't politics, mother. It's poetry.

(MARY *sniffs.*)

The Corsair. Lord Byron's poem.

MARY. I've heard of him and nothing good neither.

RUTH. Nothing good! Why, mother, he——

MARY. A lot of things, I dare say. Well, I've gone for fifty years without the power of reading and I reckon I'll go through without it to the end. I've no time to be idle.

RUTH. I've no time to be anything else.

MARY. You've taken to being a lady like a duck to water. Lazybones is the name I'd give you if you were still Ruth Butterworth, but I suppose this vain life is right for Mrs. Guy Barlow.

RUTH (*rising*). It isn't right. Idleness is never right, and least of all for me, because I know my idleness is paid for by the toil of others. Something has changed me, mother. I can't think of the past. I've forgotten what I was and what I used to think. I had ideals then, when I was poor. I'd noble thoughts of my own. The only thoughts I have to-day are thoughts of other's thinking. (*Picking Byron up.*) You're right, I'm lazy. Bone lazy, and I like it. I like fine clothes and soft living and hands that aren't work-roughened.

MARY. Small blame to you for that. I'd do the same myself.

RUTH. I'm getting fat. I'm like a pig. I never want to go out. The house is soft and warm and comfortable, and the sights I see outside are hard and cold and comfortless.

MARY. You may well say that. Things go from bad to worse. With wages down and food up it's near impossible

to make ends meet. And that's for us, with your father an overlooker. What it is for the weavers, I don't know. There's empty hearths and empty bellies this winter time.

RUTH. I know. I know and I don't care. I used to care. Something's gone dead inside me, killed by the comfort and the ease and the good living and all the things I used to hate and despise until I had them for my own.

MARY. Eh, don't you worry! When a lass has got a good husband same as you have it's little room she has in her mind for thoughts of other things.

RUTH. That's my punishment. Guy's good to me. (*Changing tone.*) Mother, I'll tell you something. I love my husband.

MARY (*puzzled*). Well, don't tell me that as if it was news to me. What did you marry him for if you didn't love him?

RUTH. I married him to use him for an instrument. And I don't care now for the things I cared for then. I only care for Guy, and what Guy does is right because he does it.

MARY. Well, I never let your father come over me like that. But there's many wives do think that road of their husbands, especially young wives. I'm a bit surprised at you being one of them for all that, Ruth. You'd always a will of your own.

RUTH. My will's asleep.

MARY. Don't let it waken up too sudden.

RUTH. No fear of that. I eat too much.

MARY. There's a-many eat too little, Ruth. There was one you used to know came in to us the other night. He'd been short of food for weeks and looked it too, poor lad.

RUTH. A friend of mine ? What friend ?

MARY (*reluctantly*). Martin Kelsall, if you want to know. There was him and others. Friends of the People they call themselves, and your father's joined them now. I never heard such talk in my life. Proper wild it was. Drilling on the moors, and knocking out the engine boiler plugs and breaking the machinery and I don't know what.

RUTH. And father, too ?

MARY. As savage as the worst of them, the silly old man. Got to threats before they'd done.

RUTH. Threats ?

MARY. Against your Guy. It's him they're bitterest against.

RUTH (*indignantly*). What's Guy done ?

MARY. You'd think there was nothing he hadn't done. You'd better tell him to be careful about going out at night. They've guns amongst them.

RUTH. Guns !

MARY. Oh, don't be frightened, lass. They won't do owt. Men like to talk. I don't take any notice of them. If they said less I'd fear them more.

RUTH. Has Martin Kelsall got a gun ?

MARY (*contemptuously*). Him ! It's bread he wants, not a gun. Gave me a message for you, Martin did.

RUTH. A message ?

MARY. "Tell her to remember me," he says.

RUTH. I understand. What must he think of me ?

MARY. What right has he to think of you at all ? Impudence I call it.

RUTH. He has the right to think me traitor. I'm a renegade. I'm——

MARY. You're Mrs. Guy Barlow, my lass, and don't you

forget it and start thinking of a famished weaver chap without a shirt to his back or a mouthful of bread for his belly.

RUTH. Is it as bad as that ?

MARY. It's hard times, Ruth, harder every day.

RUTH. The men must be desperate.

MARY. They *talk* as if they were. But what's talking ? They talked before you wed. They're talking still and I tell you things are worse.

RUTH. What's made them worse ?

MARY. They say Guy has.

RUTH. But how ?

MARY. You'd better ask him. Don't you talk to him of the factory ?

RUTH. No. I tried to do at first, but he stopped me, and I thought I'd bide my time.

MARY. You've a lot more sense than I ever gave you credit for.

RUTH. Then I fell in love with Guy and I haven't cared for anything since that.

MARY. I don't suppose you'd do a scrap of good. (*Rising as if to go.*) Well, that's how it is. A terrible lot of barking, but not a bite amongst the lot of them.

RUTH (*detaining her*). But there is danger there, danger to Guy.

MARY. I tell you they don't mean it.

RUTH. Perhaps all don't. But one man might, and one would be enough. One man can press a trigger.

MARY. There now ! I've upset you.

RUTH. Never mind that. You're sure that's all !

MARY. All what ?

RUTH. All Martin said.

MARY. You've got that fellow on the brain. No. 'Twasn't all, then. He wants to meet you.

RUTH. Tell him I will.

MARY. I'll tell him no such thing, and you a married woman.

RUTH. You'll tell him I will see him. Not here, though. He mustn't come here.

MARY. And I'll not have my house put to such a use. So that settles it.

RUTH. There is an old quarry on the moors. Martin knows. It's where the stone was quarried when they built the factory. I'll meet him there to-morrow night at eight. Will you tell him that, or must I write?

MARY. Can Martin read?

RUTH. I'm not sure. Tell him, mother.

MARY. It isn't right, but——

RUTH. You will. I'm doing this for Guy. You've stirred me from my sleep at last. To-morrow night at eight.

MARY. Well, I'll tell him.

RUTH. That's right. There's Guy's step now.

MARY. Then I'll be going. God bless you, lass. (*Kissing her.*)

(*Enter GUY.*)

GUY (*to MARY*). Good evening.

MARY (*apologetically*). I was just going, sir.

GUY (*warming himself by fire, speaking over his shoulder*). Oh, don't hurry away. You'll find it cold outside.

MARY. I must go sharp. If you're here it means factory's loosed and Matt'll be at home looking for his supper. Good night, sir.

(*Exit MARY. GUY goes to RUTH with lover-like attitude. They are on the best of terms.*)

GUY. Well, little wife, how goes it?

RUTH (*tensely*). Guy, I want to talk to you.

GUY (*sitting by fire, lightly*). The sound of your voice is the sweetest thing on earth. I'm all attention.

RUTH. This is serious, Guy. I've tried before to talk to you about the factory. You stopped me then.

GUY (*still lightly*). Of course I did. I won't have you worrying your pretty head about the factory. Besides, think of your long-suffering husband. Don't you think I get all the business I can stand across the way there? (*Waving hand towards window*.) I want a change at home. Sit down and tell me what you think of *The Corsair*.

RUTH. No. You must listen to me, Guy. I won't be put off this time.

GUY (*easily*). Oh, well, if I'm in for it, I'm in for it. What's it all about?

RUTH. You saw mother here. She's been telling me things.

GUY. Really, Ruth, you can't expect me to take any notice of your mother's old wives' tales.

RUTH. You needn't notice them. But when I'm told you're in danger, I notice them.

GUY (*still lightly*). Danger? What of?

RUTH. What have you been doing in the factory?

GUY (*sternly*). Leave that alone. That's my affair.

RUTH. And it's my affair if they murder you.

GUY (*rising*). Oh! So they've got to talking about murder have they? I'll teach them.

RUTH (*taking his arm, pleadingly*). Guy, you must be careful. For my sake.

GUY. I shall look after myself, Ruth. (*Standing by fireplace, hand on shelf*.)

RUTH. But what have you done to them? I know that since you married me you've had more power, and your father's done less than he used to. It's something you've done that's upset the weavers.

GUY (*over his shoulder*). I found it necessary to make economies and they don't like it.

RUTH. Economies! You mean you've cut their wages down?

GUY. That's it.

RUTH. And they were so pitifully low. They'd hardly enough for bread before.

GUY (*facing her*). I don't fix the price of bread. It's no use discussing it with you. You can't understand.

RUTH. I'm not thinking of them. At one time I should have done. That's over now. To-day I only think of you. And you're in danger. I know it. I know it.

GUY. Nothing's going to happen to me. I've a rough idea of what they think of me. I've taken my precautions.

RUTH. No precautions are proof against desperate men.

GUY. Then if nothing's any good, why worry?

RUTH. Something would be good. Raise their wages.

GUY. That's impossible. I've told you to drop discussing it.

RUTH. Why is it impossible? They'd more before you reduced them and you didn't starve.

GUY. No. But I wasn't building another factory then. I want every penny I can screw to-day.

RUTH. Another factory!

GUY (*with a touch of fanaticism*). Yes. I mean to have another. One was good enough for my father, but it isn't good enough for me. What was enterprising ten years ago isn't enterprising to-day. Machinery's improved since then.

RUTH. Then you're quite sure factories are right?

GUY (*grimly*). I'm quite sure they're money-makers.

RUTH. But money isn't all.

GUY. I keep on telling you not to discuss it. With your upbringing and your father's views, we're bound to differ, so for Heaven's sake talk about Byron, or anything under the sun but factories.

RUTH. I'm talking about your danger. You won't believe me.

GUY. You won't believe me when I say there is no danger because I'm prepared to meet anything.

RUTH. Including bullets? Do you wear a coat of mail?

GUY. That's the worst of reading *The Corsair*. Put this cock-and-bull story of your mother's on the top of *The Corsair* and you're ready to imagine anything. We're in England now.

RUTH. So is Nottingham.

GUY. This is Lancashire. We don't have Luddites here.

RUTH. We have plug riots. I've read it in the newspaper.

GUY. Women shouldn't read newspapers. It's all right, Ruth. Our fellows won't get out of hand.

RUTH. You're driving them to desperation, Guy. I know the other side. I've seen. Guy, won't you have mercy on them?

GUY. I'll have another factory out of them.

RUTH. Have mercy on yourself and me. I'm so happy here. You've made me love you till I would cut off my hand to save you from a scratch upon your little finger. I shan't know peace again whenever you're away.

GUY. Upon my word, Ruth, it's too bad of your mother. She ought to keep away, and not come here disturbing you

with wild tales that haven't a spark of truth in them.

RUTH. Are they wild tales?

GUY. They're wild as wind.

RUTH. But you said you'd taken precautions. If there's no truth, why take precautions?

GUY. I said anything to comfort you. Are you satisfied now?

RUTH. I'm silenced.

GUY. That's good enough.

(Enter EPHRAIM and JOHN HEPPENSTALL, another factory owner, resembling EPHRAIM in type, dress, and age. He is, however, a more timid man, and his manner is irresolute.)

EPHRAIM *(as they enter)*. Come in here, Heppenstall. *(Seeing RUTH.)* Ah! you've met my son's wife?

JOHN *(bowing politely, with a touch of courtliness)*. Good evening, Mrs. Guy. *(To GUY.)* Good evening.

GUY. Good evening, Mr. Heppenstall. *(Taking RUTH's arm)*. Ruth, my dear, Mr. Heppenstall has called on a matter of business.

RUTH. Oh, mayn't I stay and listen? I'll be as quiet as a mouse.

EPHRAIM *(genially)*. Never knew anybody like this lass of Guy's, Heppenstall. She's interested in all manner of affairs. *(To RUTH.)* You promise to be quiet?

RUTH *(eagerly)*. Oh, yes, yes.

GUY. No. Ruth's more interested in Byron than anything else. *(Holding the book to her.)* You can't read him here with us talking all the time.

RUTH. You want me to go?

GUY. Please.

RUTH *(submissively)*. Yes Guy. *(Takes book and exit.)*

GUY (*closing door behind her*). That's better. Women are sentimental, and we've to talk business. Won't you sit, Mr. Heppenstall?

JOHN (*who has been eyeing GUY with disapproval*). Thank you, Mr. Guy, I will.

(*They sit round table.*)

EPHRAIM (*after clearing his throat*). Now, Heppenstall, I'll tell you what it's all about.

JOHN. I'm waiting to hear.

EPHRAIM. You and I are rival manufacturers, but that's no reason why we shouldn't put our legs under the same table when we find the times difficult. I suppose there's no denying, they *are* difficult?

JOHN. They're more than difficult.

EPHRAIM. Then we agree so far. What threatens us threatens you. In fact, our interests are identical.

JOHN. Not quite, I think.

EPHRAIM. Eh? Well, no. What's mine isn't thine. We've each to make a profit for ourselves. But we get the profit out of weaving, and your weavers are fractious; so are ours.

JOHN. But mine aren't—or not to anything like the extent yours are.

EPHRAIM. I'm told the grumbling is universal.

JOHN. It's general up to a point, but there's a dead set at you.

EPHRAIM. At me?

JOHN. Well, no, not at you, Barlow. It's this young gentleman who's the mischief-maker.

GUY. The mischief-maker, Mr. Heppenstall?

JOHN (*defending himself*). You reduced wages. You put down fresh machinery, and got rid of men and——

GUY. And you've done the same.

JOHN. I had to follow suit or see you take my trade away. I didn't want to do it. I believe in treating men as men.

GUY. I believe in treating men as servants of the machines. It's all they are.

JOHN. No. By your leave, young gentleman, it is not all they are. They're flesh and blood. (*To EPHRAIM.*) And I'm surprised, Barlow, at your allowing your men to be reduced.

GUY. The men can live on what they're paid.

JOHN. They can't.

GUY. They do. I'm getting applications every day from men who want to be taken on.

JOHN. Yes, so am I. And why? Because the steam power's taken away their living and half a living's better than none to a starving man. (*To EPHRAIM.*) You ought to be ashamed of yourself to take advantage of them.

EPHRAIM. Well, Heppenstall, it's——

GUY (*interrupting*). I'm responsible, Mr. Heppenstall. If you've anything to say about the management of Barlow's, say it to me. My father's virtually retired.

EPHRAIM (*with spirit*). Have I? I'm not dead yet, my lad. I've given you a lot of rope, but be careful or you'll hang yourself.

JOHN (*approvingly, turning his shoulder on GUY*). That's better, Barlow. I mislike seeing you knuckle under to a boy.

(*GUY rises and goes to fireplace, standing with his back to table. JOHN speaks across table to EPHRAIM.*)

NOW, look here, I had to follow your lead when you reduced. Will you follow mine if I put them up again to what they were three months ago?

GUY (*wheeling round*). And let the weavers fancy we're afraid of them?

JOHN (*not turning*). I'm not afraid of them. I'm sorry for them.

GUY. They know better. Once give in, and they're the masters. Show them they've only to ask and threaten to get what they ask and they'll ask for more. They'll not stop at the old level.

JOHN. Oh, we can't go beyond the old figure.

GUY. No. But you'll have to if once you start putting wages on the basis of a benevolent Charity. I'm in business to buy cheap and sell dear. I want my labour as cheap as I can get it and, by God, I'll get it cheap.

EPHRAIM (*thumping table*). Are you the head of Barlow's or am I?

GUY (*impatiently*). Oh, you are, I suppose.

EPHRAIM. Then you'd better not forget it or I'll turn you out of the room and finish this talk with Heppenstall alone.

(GUY throws himself in chair by fire.)

GUY (*sighing to himself*). Oh, my God, these old men!

EPHRAIM (*to JOHN*). I agree to that. I'll raise them on condition you do the same.

GUY. I object.

EPHRAIM. Your objection is overruled.

GUY. I'm your partner.

EPHRAIM (*hotly*). I am the head of Barlow's and—
(*Manservant enters with port, glasses, etc., places on table, and exit in silence.*)

(EPHRAIM pours out wine, and offers JOHN, etc.)

GUY. The old wages won't satisfy the weavers. They grumbled then. But the point for Mr. Heppenstall is this. It may have hurt his tender heart, but when we reduced, he did the same, and he needn't cant about it now, for actions speak louder than words. The thing is that he acts with us, and we manufacturers can present a solid front and——

JOHN. Yes, but you set the bad example. I'm a business man and I had to follow or you'd have cut me out with my customers. But as a humane man, I protest, sir.

GUY. Because you look at the men. I look at the system. The system's magnificent, and if the factory system demands sacrifices, I shall sacrifice men without scruple.

JOHN. Will you sacrifice yourself?

GUY. I do sacrifice myself. I've sacrificed my personal security. I risk my life every day and I value my life, Mr. Heppenstall. I value it so much that I've taken protective measures at the factory. I've a few stout fellows there—an odd prizefighter or two, an old soldier from the French wars, nominally as watchmen, but they're men who can use their fists and handle a gun too if the worst comes.

JOHN. Ah! You've a pretty good idea of looking after yourself.

GUY. It isn't for my own sake.

JOHN (*sceptically*). No?

GUY. Oh, I've a life I'd like to live. I've a wife and I'm young and so on—but that doesn't matter. My value is as a factory owner.

EPHRAIM. Owner?

GUY. Manager, then. I believe in the system. I'm

here to spread that system, to cover Lancashire with factories and make the county manufacturing centre of the world. That is my dream, sir, the dream of cheap production, and the triumph of machinery.

JOHN. You're talking very big, young man. It takes me all my time to run one factory.

GUY. I know I'm talking big. I'm seeing big, bigger than will come in your lifetime or in mine. This thing's at the beginning. It's not secure yet, but I mean to do my part to set it firmly on its legs before I die.

JOHN. There's nothing wonderful in bigness. A thousand factories are no more wonderful than one.

GUY. Oh, you've no vision.

JOHN. And maybe you've too much. The future isn't here. The present and those weavers are. And they trouble me.

GUY. They trouble me until they've learnt who's master. After that, there'll be no trouble.

(Enter RUTH, excitedly, leaving door open behind her.)

RUTH. Guy! The men. Don't you hear them?

GUY. Men! Where?

RUTH. They're in the hall.

(Enter HENRI, JOSEPH, MATTHEW and MARTIN.)

HENRI. No, Madame Barlow, we are no longer in the hall. We are here.

EPHRAIM *(on his feet)*. What's the meaning of this?

JOE *(insolently)*. Meaning, Mr. Barlow? The meaning is, you'll either listen to us here and now or you'll have your factory fired. You can take your choice.

GUY. Fire then, and be damned to you.

JOE. Is that your answer, Mr. Barlow?

EPHRAIM. No. Come here and be quiet, Guy. Who am I speaking to?

MATTHEW. You know us, Mr. Barlow.

EPHRAIM. You're in bad company, Matt.

MATTHEW. I told you how 'twould be if you forced me into factory.

EPHRAIM. Are you the spokesman? I suppose there's a ringleader. Who is he?

HENRI. We are all leaders.

GUY (*sneering*). I've heard of armies that were all generals and no privates.

MARTIN (*quietly*). If you mean by leader who it is that's kept back the riot——

JOHN (*badly frightened*). Riot?

MARTIN. There are hundreds round your factories to-night. They're waiting there, waiting for us. I'm leader enough to hold them back until we get your answer. Take care lest I lead them in a different fashion on another night.

GUY. Mutiny, eh?

MARTIN. Oh, names don't matter, *Mr.* Guy. We could call you names, and true ones, if we liked.

EPHRAIM. So you're their leader, Martin Kelsall?

MARTIN. At your service, Mr. Barlow.

EPHRAIM. I have my doubts of that. Well now, we'll just sit down and talk this over quietly.

RUTH. Father, you amongst the rioters!

MATTHEW. We're here as peaceful delegates.

GUY. With threats of fire and murder on your tongue.

JOHN (*querulously*). What's it all about? Never mind who they are. What do they want?

HENRI. More wages.

JOE. Less machinery.

MARTIN. Close the factories.

MATTHEW. And whatever you do, give a fellow-creature a chance of living, Mr. Barlow.

EPHRAIM. Will one of you speak for all? What are your complaints?

MARTIN. I'll speak, Mr. Barlow. We complain of starvation, of being driven into your factories and——

EPHRAIM. Stop there. We drive nobody. There's no compulsion to enter our factories.

MARTIN. There's the compulsion of need. You won't have hand-loom and you've forced us into factories. You've got us there and we've been helpless before you. We've to work your hours and take your pay, and the pay's not fit to keep a dog alive. We're tired of factories. We want to live.

(Murmurs of agreement from the men.)

GUY *(rising)*. Listen to me, men. Everything must have a beginning. A great system is springing into birth. It isn't perfect yet——

MARTIN. Perfect! It's——

GUY *(proceeding)*. You are suffering the lean years. The fat ones are coming.

MARTIN. We've heard all that before. You put it down to the war, not to the machines that time.

GUY. Even England can't recover in a moment from a war like this one.

MARTIN. It was all the war last time we made complaint and when the war was over you promised us fat times, and all of us were going to go hell for leather for prosperity.

GUY. Just wait a bit. Think what a great thing this system is. We're going to make calico for the whole world. We've all a share in it.

HENRI. You get your share and ours as well.

GUY. Do try to follow me. The cotton comes to us from the sun-kissed fields of far America, grown there by planters descended from men of our own blood and——

MARTIN. The cotton's grown by slaves.

GUY. That's not my business.

MATTHEW. No. Your business is to make slaves of us here.

GUY. I'll tell you something, Mr. Butterworth. It's this, and it's from a book you know. "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

MATTHEW. I don't know about the vision, but I'm sure about the perishing. And I know where we'll go when we've finished perishing. When one of us gets up to the Golden Gate, Peter 'ull ask him what he was and he'll say a weaver, and Peter 'ull ask him no more questions. He'll just open the gate quick and say, "Poor devil, get into heaven, you've had your bellyful of hell on earth."

GUY. You'll have prosperity on earth.

MARTIN. Aye. So you've said before.

GUY. You complain of the machines. You say they've turned men away.

JOE. Aye.

GUY. Those men will soon find work.

MARTIN. Where?

GUY. I'm going to build another factory.

MARTIN. By God, you're not.

MATTHEW. Another! Isn't one hell on earth enough for you?

GUY. Patience, patience! I'm trying to explain.

MARTIN. We've no time for patience. We're famishing. And you'll build no other factory. You'll change your

tune or you'll lose the one you've got. Building new factories is no use to us. We're not builders. We're weavers.

EPHRAIM. Hold your tongue, Guy. I'll tackle this.

(GUY sits sulkily.)

MATTHEW. We'll hear the old master.

EPHRAIM. Now, my lads, the factory's there, and it's going to stop there.

(GUY takes paper and pencil from his pocket and begins to draw caricatures of the men.)

HENRI. Don't be too sure of it.

EPHRAIM. Burn it and we build another. And while it's building you'll have time to think and clear heads to think with, for you'll draw no wages in the meantime. I'm still waiting to know why you're here.

MATTHEW. If you'd not reduced wages, maybe we'd not be here.

EPHRAIM. That's it, is it?

JOE. Yes, that's it.

EPHRAIM. Will it make you happy if I put the wages up again?

MARTIN. It won't make us happy. There's been no happy weavers since machines came in.

JOHN. Is that what you want? Wages back at the old level?

MARTIN. No. We want more. The old level isn't good enough. Eight shillings a week won't keep a man, let alone a man's family.

EPHRAIM. We give your families work. You men aren't the only wage-earners. Even your children can come to us and be paid. We not only keep them away from mischief

at home, but we pay them for it. (*Rising.*) You can take that answer back. We want willing workers and if you'll go away and be satisfied with the old wages, we'll try to pay them, though it's little less than ruin for the manufacturers.

MARTIN (*scornfully*). This looks a ruined house, and you look badly fed and all with your wine, and your servants, and your money to build another factory. To hell with your eight shillings ! We want ten.

JOHN. And we want cent. per cent. profits, my man, only we don't get them.

EPHRAIM (*sternly*). This is no time for jesting, Kelsall.

MARTIN. I wasn't jesting. Ten shillings a week is what we want.

EPHRAIM. Ten is out of the question.

MATTHEW. I've made double ten with my old hand-loom. Where's the good of factories to us if that's what they bring us to ?

(*GUY rises with his drawing, comes round to JOHN and gives it him.*)

JOHN (*laughing*). Ha ! Very good. I didn't know you drew.

GUY. I've had practice lately. Drawing plans for my new factory.

(*JOHN passes it on to EPHRAIM.*)

EPHRAIM (*glancing at it*). Pssh ! (*To men.*) Well, that's what you're here for, is it ? Ten shillings.

MARTIN. Yes.

EPHRAIM. We offer eight.

MARTIN. Then I warn you there'll be consequences.

GUY. We're ready for your consequences.

EPHRAIM. Guy, I've told you to hold your tongue.
(*Reasonably.*) We've made a big concession, Kelsall.

MARTIN. You'll make a bigger if you want us satisfied.

JOHN. We do want you satisfied. We want this valley peaceful and contented.

MARTIN. Then you know what to do.

EPHRAIM. Suppose we talk it over and give you an answer to-morrow?

JOE. We've come here for an answer to-night, Mr. Barlow.

EPHRAIM. Very well. Stay here and we'll come back with an answer. Come into the other room, Mr. Heppenstall.
(*The men give way sullenly.*) Come, Guy.

(HEPPENSTALL *passes out, as* EPHRAIM *holds door open. GUY catches EPHRAIM at door.*)

GUY. Do you want your silver stolen?

EPHRAIM. Guy, I'd trust Matt Butterworth with everything I own.

GUY. And the others?

EPHRAIM. Matt will be there.

(*Exeunt GUY and EPHRAIM. Neither thinks of RUTH, who now rises from her chair by fire, crosses, and speaks with MATTHEW, while the rest appreciate the fire and examine curiously the fire-irons, etc.*)

RUTH. Father, what are you doing with these men?

MATTHEW. Mind your own business, my lass.

RUTH. I am minding it. I'm minding Guy. If anything happens to Guy, I shall hold you responsible.

MATTHEW. Guy has the remedy in his own hands.

RUTH. The remedy's in your hands. You have influence

with the men. See how they wanted you on their side. They came to you at home before I married. They'll listen to you.

MATTHEW. I've no great influence, Ruth. I'm one of the crowd. Martin Kelsall's the man they listen to.

RUTH (*glancing at the three who are now gathered round the drawing EPHRAIM left on table*). Yes. I'm going to talk to Martin. But not here. I sent him a message to-night. Can you do nothing, father?

MATTHEW. I can do nothing but what's right.

RUTH. Violence is never right.

MATTHEW. Oh, yes, it is. Often. I've counselled peace, but there's a time for war, and if the time comes, old as I am, I'll do my share.

JOE (*coming across with drawing*). Look here, Butterworth. See that? He drew it. Guy Barlow drew that. That's what he thinks of us.

MATTHEW (*taking it*). A drawing?

JOE (*pointing*). That's me.

MATTHEW. Nay, never.

JOE. I pin my waistcoat up that road 'cause all the world don't need to know I haven't got a shirt.

MATTHEW (*looking at drawing*). Yes. He's spotted that right enough.

MARTIN (*over MATTHEW's shoulder*). And that scarecrow's meant for me.

MATTHEW (*smiling in spite of himself*). Well, he's a clever drawer, Mr. Guy.

HENRI. What is that writing, Matt? You can read.

MATTHEW (*half turning away*). Yes, I can read.

(RUTH comes as if to try to secure the paper. MARTIN turns

his shoulder to her and the three men surround MATTHEW as he stands C.)

JOE. What is it?

MATTHEW (*reluctantly*). Something cruel, Joe. It's under your picture.

JOE. I can see that.

MARTIN. Out with it Matt.

MATTHEW. No need to cry aloud the shame of what a young man does in his pride.

HENRI. You think to shield him because he is your son-in-law. You are a traitor, Butterworth.

JOE. Best read it, Matt. We'll get it done outside, in any case.

MATTHEW. It isn't much. He's wrote "No shirt but dirt" below you.

JOE (*as the group breaks up*). Dirt! If I'm dirty who's fault is that but his? I don't like dirt. I'd like to be clean like him. How can a man wash properly when his belly's crying out for bread and they've put the tax on soap? I'd like a shirt. I'm weaving yards and yards of Barlow's cloth and I haven't got a shirt.

MATTHEW. It's wrong to make a jest of starving men. We've come to ask for fire for our hearths and clothes to cover our nakedness, and food for the children. We don't want fine raiment nor grand houses, nor wine like that. The simple things are good enough for us, and we come here to ask the masters for them, and all we get is a mocking picture and a cruel jest, and I'm sick and sorry that the son of Mr. Barlow and the husband of my lass should be the one that's done it. We're asking for the right to live, and all we get is contempt and shame.

MARTIN (*triumphantly*). That's brought you round at

last. We'll have no more peace-preaching from you. You know now what they think of us. We're dogs and worse than dogs. Well, dogs can bite.

RUTH (*her hand on MARTIN'S arm*). Martin!

MARTIN (*roughly shaking her off*). I've no word for you. You've gone wrong. (*Moving.*) Let's clear away. No need to wait. We've got their answer here in this. (*Tapping picture in MATTHEW'S hand.*) To-morrow night we'll meet up on the moors and march down on the factory.

HENRI. I said I'd hear you frozen English sing the Marseillaise.

RUTH. The moors!

MATTHEW. It's not a lawful thing to meet like that.

JOE. Lawful! Who cares for the laws of London here? I'd take the Luddites' oath to-night, and that's an oath no man can dare to break.

MARTIN. Swear by your vacant concave belly, man. (*Tapping JOE'S stomach.*) You'll find no stronger oath than that.

MATTHEW. They'll have the law of you.

MARTIN. The law doesn't care for us. The law lets us starve. We've finished with palaver now. We've got to do.

(*They are reaching the door when EPHRAIM, JOHN and GUY enter by the opposite door.*)

EPHRAIM. Where are you going?

MARTIN. We're tired of waiting.

EPHRAIM. Come, come! We had to consider our answer.

(*The men come back.*)

JOE (*closing door, L.*). Well, have you got your answer?

EPHRAIM. Yes. Go back to your fellows and tell them this : We will raise wages to the old figure——

MARTIN. We've refused that.

EPHRAIM. Let me finish, my man. And as to a further increase, when you've tried how you go on and we've all of us thought it over and feel a little calmer than we do now, well, we'll see if we can't do something more for you.

HENRI. You will see now if you mean to see at all.

EPHRAIM. That's my last word, men. You've got a lot. Now go away and be reasonable.

MARTIN. And this is my last word, Mr. Barlow. You've refused, and refused with scorn.

EPHRAIM. Scorn ? I've not——

MARTIN. If you haven't, *he* has (*pointing at GUY*), and we know which of the pair is boss. You think you are, but we and Mr. Guy know better. He's boss and (*taking picture from MATTHEW*) he calls us dirty and makes insulting pictures of us for you to laugh at. We shan't do anything to-night. To-morrow night we're meeting on the moors. Look to your factory, then.

GUY. If I'm boss, listen to me. I've told you I believe in factories.

MARTIN. And I tell you you'll have no factory to believe in. We're tired of machinery.

GUY. The machines are going on. Factories are going on. It's my life's work to push them on.

HENRI. Then look to your life.

GUY. The system's going on. It may break men in the making. It may break me. But, by God, I'll break you first. Ideas are greater than men. They conquer men. You can burn and kill and scotch the system *here*, but the idea will go on in spite of you and anything you rioters can

do to us. You can crush us perhaps, but you can't kill the idea. Factories will spring up and men will live and die for them and roll themselves against them like waves against the rocks, but the factories are permanent because the world is crying for our cloth.

JOE. And I haven't got a shirt.

GUY. A shirt! The world doesn't care for you. It's cloth by the hundred thousand yards they want. It's not your petty wants the system cares about. It's——

MARTIN. Then to hell with the system. We're petty, and, as you say, we can't do much. We can't stop factories being built elsewhere. But we can stop them here. We're broken men, but our spirit isn't broken yet. You've set up your last machine. Your system may be all you think, but men come first.

GUY. Your men or mine?

MARTIN. The men you've driven desperate. The starving, ragged men with wives and children hunger-mad, with everything to win and nowt to lose. It's men like that that win. Men with the choice of fighting hard or dying slow. Men with a bitter hatred in their hearts and knowledge in their heads that machinery's the cause of all. Men fighting for themselves against the men that fight for money and for you. Your hired bullies won't last long. We know they're there, and know we'll see them run.

GUY (*soberly*). You'll waste your blood. You may waste life. I've got men there. I don't deny it. And I ask you not to break yourselves against them. You're thinking me a coward, but it isn't that.

MARTIN (*sneering*). Oh? What is it then?

GUY. It's that I *know*. It won't be you and it won't be I who will win this fight.

JOE. It must be one of us.

GUY. No. We may have ups and downs, but the system will conquer us both.

MARTIN. To-morrow night your factory will burn. We meet up on the moors, not tens or twenties of us, but every man of Barlow's and of Heppenstall's, and——

GUY. And we'll be glad to see you. Good night.

MATTHEW (to EPHRAIM). Mr. Barlow——

EPHRAIM (*shaking his head*). My son speaks for me, Matt.

(*Exeunt* MARTIN, HENRI, JOE, MATTHEW.)

GUY. The blazing fools! To give away their meeting-place.

JOHN. The moors are wide.

GUY. They meet beneath the quarry. I know their place. We'll get them there. One good surprise attack and we shall hear no more of meetings.

RUTH. Guy, you're going into danger.

GUY. Not I while there are redcoats to fight my battles for me.

RUTH. Soldiers!

GUY. What else are soldiers for? I ride to Blackburn barracks to-night. We'll teach these rioters a lesson that they'll not forget. Write me the summons to the barracks, father. You're a magistrate.

EPHRAIM. It's a heavy responsibility, Guy.

GUY. A flaming factory's the alternative.

EPHRAIM. Pass me the paper.

(*Sits at table and writes, JOHN bending over him. GUY goes to fireplace, takes a pair of spurs from mantel and straps them on. RUTH follows him.*)

RUTH. Guy, must you ride yourself? Can't you send somebody you trust?

GUY (*grimly*). I'm sending somebody I trust.

RUTH. It's dangerous.

GUY. Rioting's a dangerous pastime—for the rioters.

RUTH (*appealingly*). But soldiers in the valley, Guy! You'll never be forgiven. It always will be war between you and the weavers if you bring soldiers here. They'll be revenged.

GUY (*straightening his back and taking the second spur, bending to put it on*). Meantime, I've got to save the factory.

RUTH. And I have got to save the factory and you.

GUY. You!

RUTH (*tensely*). Can I do nothing, Guy?

EPHRAIM (*holding out the paper, without rising*). The summons, Guy.

GUY (*replying to RUTH*). Yes. You can pass me the summons.

(*He bends, fastening the spur. RUTH goes slowly to EPHRAIM, takes the paper and hesitates as if intending to tear it, then jerks her head and takes it to GUY, who accepts, straightening himself and pocketing it.*)

GUY. Ah! That's all right.

EPHRAIM (*who has been filling three wine glasses, rising with glass*). Here's to your ride, Guy.

GUY (*coming to table and filling a fourth glass*). I'll give you a better toast than that. The factory. (*Passing RUTH glass.*)

EPHRAIM }
JOHN } (*drinking together*). The factory.

GUY. Ruth!

(RUTH hesitates, meets GUY's eye until he masters her.)

RUTH. The factory.

(She gulps as if taking poison. GUY drinks his glass off and goes to door.)

CURTAIN.

ACT III

A rough road terminates in the quarry whose hewn crags rise high at the right. Below them, behind the road is an old shed of planks, open to the front. To the left, the quarrying has caused a steep dip. The road ends, the rock descends to it and beyond, so that the opposite side of the valley below is visible, seen dimly in the night. Gorse and heather grow over the deserted workings. There is no moon, but the lighting is sufficiently strong for faces to be seen.

RUTH, warmly clad, sits on a stone by the shed, a lighted lantern at her feet. After a moment, MARTIN, without greatcoat, enters.

RUTH (*as he comes*). Are you there, Martin?

MARTIN. I am here.

RUTH (*rising, nervously*). I had begun to fear you would not come.

MARTIN. I know I'm late. To-night I'd work to do, for once in my useless life.

RUTH. Don't be bitter, Martin.

MARTIN. The bitterness is past. My work is done, well done. I came when I was free to come, Mrs. Barlow.

RUTH. Is it to be names like that between us two?

MARTIN. I don't know what there is between us two,

save that I got a message from your mother to meet you here.

RUTH. I chose this place because we used to meet here often.

MARTIN. In happier days.

RUTH. I chose it to remind you of them.

MARTIN (*bitterly*). I don't need to be reminded. I'm striving to forget. I want to kill their memory and I can't.

RUTH. I thought you had.

MARTIN. And why?

RUTH. Last night.

MARTIN. What has last night to do with it?

RUTH. It seemed to me last night that you'd forgotten.

MARTIN. It always seems to me that you forget.

RUTH. I? It's you forget. Forget our hope of happiness together and why we gave it up, forget the terms on which I gave myself to him.

MARTIN. Your plan, your terms. Not mine.

RUTH. We both agreed that it was best.

MARTIN. Well, if we did? Now you've had your way, now you are Guy Barlow's wife? Have you done anything? Does the plan work, or——?

RUTH (*interrupting*). It all takes time.

(MARTIN *moves impatiently*.)

And you agreed to that. That it would take time. That I was to be given my chance. And now, last night, you spoilt it all. You——

MARTIN (*harshly*). Your plan's been tried and failed. You've done nothing. Less than nothing. Things have gone worse

RUTH. And if they have——

MARTIN. They have,

RUTH. Will what you're doing help? Are threats of violence better?

MARTIN. No. But we don't threaten.

RUTH (*surprised*). Not threaten!

MARTIN (*coolly*). We burn the factory to-night. And if your—husband tries to interfere, so much the worse for him. (*Producing pistol from pocket.*) There's food and drink for many a day gone to the buying of this.

RUTH. Martin! A pistol! You!

MARTIN. He talks of putting up another factory. (*Grimly.*) It's going to stop at talk.

RUTH. A pistol! (*Coaxing.*) I've never had a pistol in my hand. Let me feel it, Martin.

MARTIN (*replacing it*). They're dangerous toys.

RUTH. But I'll hold it by the handle.

MARTIN. It's safer where it is. It's no good, Ruth. You haven't wheedled Guy Barlow into being soft with us, and you won't wheedle me into being soft with him. You're no great hand at wheedling for all your pretty face.

RUTH (*feigning indignation*). Oh, do you think it's Guy I care about?

MARTIN (*drily*). I think somehow it is.

RUTH. You have no right——

MARTIN. What else am I to think? For all these months I get no word from you. Your mother talks of nothing but your happiness with him. I know you're living there in luxury with him, and I see you dressed the way you are. What can I think but that he's won you round?

RUTH. I'm not a cat to be won over with caresses.

MARTIN. You always fancied finery.

RUTH. Finery! It's good for finery to bring it on the moors to-night.

MARTIN. It keeps you warm.

RUTH. So does my fire. And yet I've left my fire I'm here.

MARTIN. Why are you here?

RUTH. To see you.

MARTIN. Only that?

RUTH. What else?

MARTIN. Why do you choose this night of all the nights that have gone by since—since we made our plan and you took him for husband?

RUTH. To-night's the first since yesterday.

MARTIN. Why yesterday?

RUTH. You sent a message by my mother. She gave it to me yesterday.

MARTIN. I'd forgotten that. So much has happened since.

RUTH. Then you should trust me all the more. I'm here in spite of all. I'm risking everything to come to tell you what you do is wrong, utterly, hopelessly wrong.

MARTIN. What do you risk?

RUTH. I risk my plan. Let Guy find out I meet you, and where's my chance of influencing him? Where's my reward for sending you away? I risk my life, my hope, my all.

MARTIN (*sceptically*). It sounds a lot.

RUTH. It is a lot.

MARTIN. Well, I too take risks to-night.

RUTH. Yes, greater than you know.

MARTIN. Ah!

RUTH. But you shall not take them. That's why I'm here. To stop you. You'll ruin all if this goes on to-night.

MARTIN. We'll ruin his factory.

RUTH. You'll bring black ruin on yourselves. Oh, listen to me, Martin. I know. I know. Guy's got the soldiers coming.

MARTIN (*eagerly*). They're coming *here*?

RUTH. Yes. Didn't you say you all met here below to-night?

MARTIN. Yes.

RUTH. Soldiers, Martin. Can you fight soldiers?

MARTIN. After to-night there'll be no factory to fight about.

RUTH. There always will be factories.

MARTIN. Yes? So he said last night. But we know better.

RUTH. There will, there will. They'll build others, and while they're building you'll be starving, and when they're built, do you think there'll be work for you or my father or any man who lifts a hand to-night? You'll all be hanged or rotting in some gaol, and wages for the rest lower than ever to pay them out for the doings of this night. Don't do it, Martin. Leave Guy to me. I'll manage him, but I must bide my time.

MARTIN. And meantime we must live a living death. A bullet's better, Ruth.

RUTH. Oh, maybe better for the few they hit. Death's not important. Think of the others who'll live on. Don't be selfish, Martin.

MARTIN. Selfish! I'm doing all for others. I don't care for myself.

RUTH. You do. You care to be the leader. You care for your pride, the pride that won't let you draw back because you dare not seem to have an afterthought, the pride that's going to strew that valley with the ruined lives of men and corpses of the dead.

MARTIN. I can't draw back now. It's too late, Ruth.

RUTH. It's never too late. (*Suddenly terrified.*) You are their leader, Martin? They won't do anything without your word?

MARTIN. I am their leader, Ruth. To-night's plan is mine.

RUTH. Then so long as you stay here nothing can happen.

MARTIN. I shan't stay long.

RUTH. You will. I've got you and I mean to keep you here. Thank God, I came.

MARTIN. You've come, but I've told you it's too late now.

RUTH. Oh, no, it's not. You can't deceive me, Martin. I know this is the meeting-place. I heard you all say so last night. The moors below the quarry. Are the men there, Martin?

MARTIN. There are men there. Listen.

(*Faintly, the strains of the Marseillaise are heard from below L., and with them the barking of dogs.*)

The song that Henri Callard brought from France and made into an English song to put the spirit of a revolution into us. The song of life and hope.

RUTH. No, Martin, the song of death.

MARTIN. Perhaps it is, for Barlow's bullies at the factory.

RUTH. Martin, don't go. Don't give the word. For my sake, Martin.

MARTIN. The song is calling.

RUTH. Are we English to be French and lose our senses for a song? Is all that you and I have said and done to go for naught?

MARTIN. Ruth, tell the truth

RUTH. The truth?

MARTIN. Is it you and I or you and that other?

RUTH. Other?

MARTIN. You know whom I mean. Guy Barlow.

RUTH. I love him, Martin.

MARTIN. At last! The truth.

RUTH. I love him, and you're going to kill my husband. If when you said you couldn't lose the memory of me you spoke the truth, you'll spare him, Martin. You won't go down amongst those men and lead them to the factory. I tried my best to carry out our plan. You told me that he wouldn't marry me, but I made him do it. And afterwards I tried. I did try, Martin. Only Guy's my husband and I love him now. I've learnt to love him till my love's the greatest thing in all the world. Don't kill him, Martin.

MARTIN. It will not be killing, Ruth. It won't be murder if a bullet finds its way in Guy Barlow's heart. Not murder, but an accident.

RUTH. You mean to kill him.

MARTIN. Not man's vengeance, Ruth, but God's.

RUTH. You mean to murder him. What shall I do? (*Changing her tone.*) Martin, you loved me once. Is that love dead?

MARTIN. Dead? Love needs nourishment and you have starved my love.

RUTH. What if I said I'm here to nourish it? Would you go down there then?

MARTIN. Nourish? How?

RUTH (*holding up lantern*). Am I still beautiful, Martin?

MARTIN. Yes. So Guy Barlow thinks.

RUTH. Don't you?

MARTIN. Delilah!

RUTH. Was Delilah married?

MARTIN. No.

(The Marseillaise is heard again, more loudly. Below L., torches appear. MARTIN'S attention is attracted.)

RUTH. Don't look down there. They're singing. Let them sing.

MARTIN. And if I stay?

(RUTH makes a gesture of surrender.)

You mean it, Ruth?

RUTH. I mean—everything.

MARTIN. My God, you're beautiful! *(Harshly.)* Put out the lantern.

RUTH. Give me your pistol first.

MARTIN. My pistol?

RUTH. Yes.

(A pause. MARTIN takes it out, half offers it, then, with a suspicious look, gives it her.)

MARTIN. The lantern.

(RUTH blows it out. As MARTIN draws her towards the shed, voices are heard.)

EPHRAIM. I'm convinced your men won't be needed, Captain.

GUY. We shall soon see.

(Enter EPHRAIM, GUY and CAPTAIN LASCELLES, a youngish officer. GUY has a lantern which he places on the ground.)

Personally I fancy we shall show you a little sport.

CAPTAIN. Sorry sport, Mr. Barlow. I fought the French with a relish. They're our natural foes. But this setting English at English goes against the grain with me.

EPHRAIM. Excellent sentiments, Captain Lascelles.

GUY (*sneering*). I used to think the whole duty of a soldier was to fight.

CAPTAIN. The duty of a soldier is to obey orders. That, sir, is why I am at the disposal of your father, who represents the civil authority. But I've no stomach for firing on unarmed men.

(*The Marseillaise and the dogs are heard.*)

GUY. Listen! That's very near.

CAPTAIN. So are the singers. Look there.

(*EPHRAIM and GUY look over with him.*)

EPHRAIM. Torches! There's a big crowd there. Why didn't we hear them?

CAPTAIN. We came uphill. The hill cut off the sound.

EPHRAIM. Dogs? What are the dogs for?

GUY (*well satisfied*). Well, Captain, like it or not, you'll have warm work to-night.

CAPTAIN. To be candid with you, I don't like it at all.

GUY. You make me alter my opinion of the British officer.

CAPTAIN. Sir! I saw service in the Peninsular and I was under fire at Waterloo——

GUY. But a handful of scarecrow weavers is too much for you because they're English.

CAPTAIN. A few are not, Mr. Barlow. But those torches don't indicate a few, but a very much larger number than I have force to cope with.

EPHRAIM (*timidly*). There certainly is a great number.

GUY (*to CAPTAIN*). In other words, you shirk your duty.

CAPTAIN (*controlling himself*). I don't want to quarrel

with a civilian. (*Turning to EPHRAIM.*) Am I to get my men into position, sir?

EPHRAIM (*hesitating*). Well—their number is certainly alarming. (*Turning to GUY for a lead.*)

GUY (*curtly*). Yes.

EPHRAIM (*to CAPTAIN*). If you please, Captain.

CAPTAIN. Very well. You've a copy of the Riot Act with you?

EPHRAIM (*nervously*). Yes. I hope I shall not have to read it.

CAPTAIN. That is for you to decide.

EPHRAIM. Yes. (*Calling.*) Guy!

GUY (*by the shed*). One minute, sir. There's a smell of tallow here.

CAPTAIN (*without suspicion*). Your lantern.

GUY. That didn't smell before.

CAPTAIN (*impatiently*). The torches below there, then. The wind would carry their reek.

GUY. Yes. Only there doesn't happen to be a wind.

CAPTAIN (*suspicious now*). The shed?

GUY (*picking up lantern*). I'll see.

(*He holds up lantern, disclosing RUTH and MARTIN at opposite ends of the shed.*)

There's no one there. Must have been our lantern. What did you want, father?

EPHRAIM. Guy, hadn't we better leave it? I don't want bloodshed. They're decent fellows at heart, and we don't know they mean to attack. I can't believe it of them. Wait till they do and use the soldiers to guard the factory.

GUY. What's the use of waiting till they attack? Take them here unprepared and you make a thorough job of it.

CAPTAIN. Yes : only I can't promise to take them unprepared.

GUY. Why not ? Have I to teach you your business ? Get your men round them in the dark and——

CAPTAIN. It won't be dark. The clouds will be off the moon soon.

GUY (*sarcastically*). Then as Nature won't assist you, Captain, you'll have to draw upon the great store of military tactics you no doubt acquired in your numerous campaigns. How long will it take to get your men placed between that crowd and the factory ?

CAPTAIN. Oh, say ten minutes. The moon will be clear before then.

GUY. I hope it won't. They'll run like hares at the sight of a uniform, and I want them taught a lesson they'll not forget in a hurry.

EPHRAIM (*picking up lantern*). Shall we go ?

GUY. Yes. I'll join you below.

EPHRAIM. Join ? Aren't you coming ?

GUY. In a minute. For the moment I have business here.

CAPTAIN. What business are we to imagine that can keep you here alone ?

GUY. You can imagine any business you like. You can imagine me praying for the British Army when it is officered by men like you, but, at any rate, you can leave me here.

CAPTAIN (*sneering*). Yes. You'll be quite out of danger here, Mr. Barlow.

EPHRAIM (*appealingly*). Gentlemen !

GUY (*to CAPTAIN*). Hadn't you better look after your men ? Your ten minutes are flying.

CAPTAIN (*turning to go*). I shall deal with you afterwards.

GUY (*smoothly*). With pleasure. My business is to deal in cotton cloth with all comers. I don't discriminate.

CAPTAIN. Pah! Shopman!

(*Exeunt CAPTAIN and EPHRAIM.*)

GUY (*by shed*). Come out.

(*MARTIN and RUTH emerge, MARTIN crosses L. and looks down.*)

Yes. It's steep, isn't it? You'll not escape that way unless you've wings.

MARTIN. Escape? I don't want to escape.

GUY. You're looking for a way.

MARTIN. I'm looking at the great crowd your father saw.

GUY. Yes. You've brought your ragamuffins out, but you'll find it a tougher job to make them fight.

MARTIN. I don't intend to let those lads down there fight soldiers.

GUY (*barring the way, though MARTIN doesn't move*). And I don't intend to let you warn them. You're going to stay here.

MARTIN (*limply*). I can shout.

GUY. Why don't you? Shout till you brast your lungs, my lad. It won't carry downhill.

MARTIN (*acquiescing very easily*). Then you must do your butcher's handiwork. (*With energy.*) Butchers! Yes. That's just the word.

GUY. Ah! So you do know when you're beaten. Well, Kelsall, as you heard while you were eavesdropping, I've ten minutes to fill in. Ten minutes isn't long. There's no margin for lies.

MARTIN. The truth about your factory is the last thing you'll listen to.

GUY. The truth about my wife is what I'm waiting for.

MARTIN. Hadn't you better ask her?

GUY. I don't question my wife before a workman.

MARTIN. Shall I leave you? (*But he doesn't move.*)

GUY. You don't seem in any hurry.

MARTIN (*easily*). No. The time for that is past. I've stayed here too long for going now.

RUTH. Thank God, then I've succeeded.

GUY (*coldly*). Succeeded? How?

RUTH. I've kept him here until the danger passed. He meant to burn the factory and murder you. He told me so and I—I kept him here. I've played with him. I've——

MARTIN. You played with fire, and it's not your fault you haven't burnt yourself.

RUTH (*to GUY*). What did it matter what I said? I've saved your life. I've kept him here.

GUY. How did you get him here?

RUTH. I sent for him.

GUY. Why should he come for your sending?

MARTIN. You don't question your wife before a workman, do you?

GUY. No. You're right. This can wait.

RUTH. Guy, I sent because last night I heard him threaten you. I wanted to persuade him——

GUY. Your methods of persuasion are peculiar.

RUTH. They kept him here. That was what I had to do. At any cost to keep him here.

GUY. Ruth, I begin to think that reading Byron isn't good for you.

MARTIN. Why put it on to Byron? Hasn't his noble Lordship sinned enough of his own?

RUTH. Guy, don't you see? He's the men's leader.

They won't do anything without him. He told me that. That they would wait for him to give the word.

MARTIN. I told you that it was too late. I came up here to-night without imperilling my plans. It didn't matter that (*snapping his fingers*) how long you kept me here. Succeeded! The only thing you've succeeded in is in arousing your husband's suspicions.

GUY. Be careful, Kelsall.

MARTIN. I've nothing to be careful about. I could be at Jericho for all the difference it'll make.

RUTH. You told me you were their leader.

MARTIN. The leader of a movement is the brain of it. Brain is scarcer than brawn, and therefore——

GUY. Therefore it skulks up here in safety.

MARTIN. Yes, that's what that soldier said to you.

(*GUY makes a threatening gesture.*)

Oh, but he's wrong, of course. You don't suppose Lord Wellington was in the firing line at Waterloo? He left fools like your soldier friend to feed the powder. A leader's business is direction.

GUY. Am I to understand that you direct? You?

MARTIN (*quietly*). I have directed. In no long time I hope to see the fruits of my direction.

GUY. Down there? (*Pointing L.*) There'll be a crop of broken heads if that's the fruit you're looking for.

MARTIN. I'm looking up, not down.

GUY. Up?

MARTIN. A sign in the heavens.

GUY (*bewildered*). The heavens!

MARTIN (*passionately*). Don't you believe in heaven? Sometimes I don't. I find it difficult to believe in a just

God who lets you live and lets your machinery be made and lets you starve your weavers. But I have faith to-night, Guy Barlow, a mighty faith in the all-seeing God who's brought us face to face, oppressor and oppressed, avenger and——

RUTH (*as MARTIN approaches GUY*). Be careful, Guy, he means to do you harm.

GUY (*gently putting her aside*). My dear Ruth, I'm quite convinced you read too much. Romance and Mrs. Radcliffe are fitting for your withdrawing-room, but please don't bring them out of doors. You told me once romance was dangerous for women. I find it is.

RUTH. But he was armed. Thank God, I've got his pistol.

GUY (*losing temper*). You got his pistol! Confound you, what did you do that for? I can't shoot the fellow in cold blood.

MARTIN. Oh, you needn't scruple. Life's no use to a weaver in Barlow's factory, and my work is finished now.

GUY (*to RUTH*). Give it him back.

RUTH. You'll fight together if I do.

GUY. Do as I tell you, Ruth.

(RUTH holds out the pistol to MARTIN, who doesn't take it.)

MARTIN. I warn you this is murder.

GUY. You shouldn't carry firearms if you're not competent to use them.

MARTIN. The murder is of you. This is my night, Guy Barlow. You've had the power to starve and sweat the weavers of the valley, but the tide has turned at last. The luck's on my side now, and if we fight and one of us should fall, it won't be I that has to die to-night.

RUTH. You shall not fight. This pistol's mine. I won

it from you. I do what *I* like with my own. (*She flings it down the cliff. It is heard to strike and, rebounding, strike again.*)

GUY. Rebellion is in the air to-night. You've caught the prevalent disease, my Ruth.

RUTH. Guy, this man means to kill you.

GUY. I mean to kill this man. But I've a scruple that prevents my shooting down an unarmed man.

RUTH. You're both safe then.

GUY. Not while my pistol's left. He seems to think the luck is on his side. We'll put that to the test by tossing for the first shot.

RUTH. But he might win.

GUY. That will decide the point at issue. Luck will be on his side. You've got your chance now, Kelsall. (*Taunting him.*) What was it? Oppressor and oppressed, avenger and avenged?

MARTIN. My God, I wish I had your coolness.

GUY. Blood will tell, you know. Do you accept?

MARTIN (*in a rush*). Yes, I accept.

GUY. Good. Shall I spin a coin or you?

MARTIN. I don't bring money out. It's scarce with me.

GUY. Then I provide both pistol and coin.

MARTIN. And corpse.

GUY. You're getting back your spirit. Will you call?

(*He spins a coin. RUTH puts her foot on it as it falls. At the same time the moon lights up the scene.*)

Now that's really very thoughtful of the moon. The target will be visible, and we can see the coin as soon as you remove your foot.

RUTH. I shall not remove my foot.

GUY. And Kelsall quite forgot to call. He's too busy shivering.

MARTIN. I'm cold.

GUY (*taking another coin, spinning and catching rapidly*). This time, Kelsall.

MARTIN. Heads.

GUY (*looking*). The pistol's yours.

(MARTIN *crosses doubtfully and takes it.*)

Oh yes, it's loaded.

RUTH (*facing MARTIN, covering GUY, melodramatically*) Martin, you'll shoot him through my body.

GUY. I'm sure that's out of Mrs. Radcliffe, Ruth. It has the true romantic ring. Will you help me to tie her up, Kelsall? It's a bore to have to ask the favour, but——

MARTIN. You're smiling and you're going to die.

GUY. It's possible, but these cold nights do make a man's hand shake, don't they? Your luck may not be altogether in. The heavens do not send the sign you look for.

MARTIN. They sent the moon to shoot you by.

GUY. Yes. Get out of the way, Ruth, unless you want to be tied up. Stand clear. This fellow's hand's so shaky he might hit you by mistake. Go ahead, Kelsall. Remember your wrongs and your faith and blaze away.

MARTIN (*half raising the pistol, then dropping it*). I can't do it. It's the chance I've prayed for and I can't do it.

GUY. Oh come, Kelsall. Remember what's expected of a leader of the men.

MARTIN (*jerking up his head*). I've beaten you there. Yes, now I understand. I'm not afraid to shoot.

GUY. My mistake.

MARTIN. Oh, I've a sweeter revenge than that. Shoot,

and you'd never know the way that you've been fooled this night.

GUY. You didn't shoot because you lacked the pluck.

MARTIN. The thing I didn't lack was brain to outwit you and bring you on a fool's errand to the moors while—
(*Pausing.*)

GUY (*alarmed*). While what?

MARTIN. Oh, while the moon came out and showed your military friends the truth.

GUY. The truth? What is the truth?

MARTIN. Oh, you shall know. I'm keeping you alive that you may know.

GUY. What is it, you—

(*Enter CAPTAIN and EPHRAIM.*)

CAPTAIN (*entering*). Are you there, Barlow? (*Seeing him.*) Oh— (*Saluting RUTH.*)

GUY. Never mind these people. What is it?

CAPTAIN. Confound it, that's what *I* want to know.

GUY. What are you doing here? Why aren't you down there surrounding those weavers?

CAPTAIN. Well, you see, the fact is, there are no weavers.

EPHRAIM. Dogs, Guy. You remember I noticed the dogs.

GUY. Dogs? Have you both gone mad? My patience! What is it?

CAPTAIN (*drawing him to look*). You see those torches?

GUY (*impatiently*). Of course.

CAPTAIN. But you can't see who's carrying them from here.

GUY. I don't need to see. I know. It's the weavers' meeting.

CAPTAIN. Weavers ! They're sheep, sir. Sheep with torches fastened to them and not a man in sight.

GUY. Sheep !

MARTIN (*quietly*). You'll remember I said butchers was the right word.

GUY. Sheep ! But we heard singing.

MARTIN. A dozen men can make a noise. They'll have sore throats to-morrow.

GUY. Sheep !

MARTIN (*ringingly*). Look up ! I've got my sign in the heavens.

(*The sky is illuminated by the great leaping glare of a distant fire.*)

CAPTAIN. Fire !

MARTIN. This is my night after all, Guy Barlow. The factory's ablaze.

CURTAIN.

ACT IV

Later the same night. Scene as ACT II. Wine and glasses on table. The curtains are drawn apart and the glare of the burning factory is seen. EPHRAIM and JOHN are in the window.

JOHN. It's a sad sight, Barlow.

EPHRAIM. A sight I cannot bear to see. Shut it out. Shut it out. (*He draws curtains.*)

(*JOHN lays a sympathetic hand on his shoulder, and EPHRAIM goes slowly to chair by fireplace.*)

I built it, Heppenstall, the first factory in these parts, fifteen years ago, and there it's stood through all these years a monument of enterprise, until I'd grown to love the very stone of it. They mocked me when I put it up. They called it Barlow's Folly. But I knew. I knew machinery had come to stay, and now new factories are springing up, and building one to-day is not the same great thing it was. The glamour's gone.

JOHN. But you'll rebuild.

EPHRAIM. Guy will rebuild. I doubt if I shall care for what he does. This night has broken me.

JOHN. Come, come, now, don't give way like that.

EPHRAIM. It's easy talk for you. Your factory is sound. They've left it standing.

JOHN. Aye. You were the scapegoats.

EPHRAIM. And all my business checked. Customers to disappoint. Connections broken and——

JOHN. They will come back to you.

EPHRAIM. And when? You can burn fast, but you rebuild slowly. And the misery, Heppenstall, the misery of it.

JOHN. You're thinking of your men?

EPHRAIM. Aye and their families.

JOHN. A merciful man, Barlow.

EPHRAIM. Oh, let the leaders swing for it. It's their desert. But all the others, just the heedless fools they've led astray. I'm sorry for them in the bitter days to come. Guy's been too hard on them.

JOHN. Yes. Guy's been hard. A wilful, headstrong man. But, hearkee, Barlow, I've a plan that will smooth out the crookedness for you.

EPHRAIM. A plan?

JOHN. You've been a rival of me, and your son has made the rivalry no pleasant thing. But you and I are friends, and sooner than see you suffer for your son, I'll run my place by night as well as day, and you can put your people there by night and keep faith with your customers.

EPHRAIM (*rising*). Why, Heppenstall, that's generous.

JOHN. There's something in the doctrine which that fighting-cock of yours was preaching here last night. We manufacturers must cling together, Barlow, only he wanted us to cling to his policy and, by your leave, we'll cling to mine. It lets you satisfy your customers and keep your weavers living, and it gives me the chance of rapping Mr. Guy Barlow on the knuckles.

EPHRAIM (*timidly*). Do you think he'll let——?

JOHN. Why, man alive, I hope that you are master here.

EPHRAIM. I shall take no pleasure in it now.

(*Enter GUY.*)

That old factory was like another son to me.

GUY (*in high spirits*). And a damned rickety child it was.

EPHRAIM. Guy!

GUY (*good-humouredly*). You will get a new son, father A lusty son with new machinery in the guts of him.

EPHRAIM. It will not be my old factory.

GUY. No, by the Lord, it won't. It will be efficient. Come, father, bear up. We'll soon have that site covered up again with another son for you, and there's no love like the love of a man for the child of his old age.

EPHRAIM. It won't be my child, Guy.

GUY. Then call it your grandson and dote upon him as a grandad should.

JOHN. Is this a time for your jesting, Mr. Guy?

GUY. Maybe you think you've the laugh of me, Mr. Heppenstall, you with your factory unburnt. Wait till my new building is complete with all the last word in machinery, Look to your business then. I'll show you what a factory should be.

EPHRAIM. Guy, you sound—almost—as if you are glad.

GUY. Why not? We're well insured.

EPHRAIM. And our customers, meantime?

GUY. Customers? Fire breaks all contracts.

EPHRAIM. Not mine. Not while there exists a way of carrying them out.

GUY. There is no way.

JOHN. You'll pardon me, there is. I have offered your father the use of my factory by night.

GUY. By night? We should lose money. There would be you to pay, and weaving by candlelight is expensive.

EPHRAIM. Then let us lose money. I will carry out my contracts. And—think of the weavers, Guy.

GUY. Let them starve.

EPHRAIM. I won't. I will hang the leaders. But the rest shall live.

GUY. They will live somehow. When we want them again, they will be there. Meantime, they shall be punished.

EPHRAIM. I say they shall not, and by our good friend's help they need not be.

GUY. Our good friend is to run his factory by day and night and take his profit out of us. So much for friendship.

EPHRAIM. He must certainly be compensated for turning his place upside down.

GUY. Why turn it upside down?

EPHRAIM. For the sake of the weavers whom I will not desert.

GUY. Did I burn their livelihood? No. They did. Let them suffer for it.

EPHRAIM. Guy, I have to remind you again that I am the head of the firm.

GUY. Very well, then. I break my connection with the firm.

EPHRAIM. Guy! Barlow & Son.

GUY. In future there will be two firms. The first is a charitable institution which penalizes itself to find work for riotous weavers who burn its factory. The second firm exists to make money.

EPHRAIM. You mustn't do that, Guy. Not the factory and the firm on one black night. I can't stand both.

GUY. Then the firm goes on on my terms.

EPHRAIM. You mustn't leave me, Guy.

GUY. Very well. Barlow & Son decline your offer with thanks, Mr. Heppenstall. (*He turns to table, pours wine and drinks.*)

JOHN. Barlow, do you mean to tell me——?

EPHRAIM. I give him best, Heppenstall. The lad is a stronger man than I am. Henceforth I am a looker-on.

GUY (*seated at table*). Father, hand me those plans.

EPHRAIM. Plans, Guy?

GUY. The new factory, man. Do you think there's time to waste? (*He finds pistol uncomfortable in his pocket, takes out and puts on table.*) Hah! That's finished with. I use a stronger weapon. This. (*Taking up pen and bending over the plans which EPHRAIM has put before him.*)

JOHN. Come away, Barlow.

EPHRAIM. Yes. Yes. I think—(*he follows JOHN haltingly to door.*)

(*Exeunt EPHRAIM and JOHN. GUY is busy with the plans.*)

Enter RUTH quickly. She closes door and leans against it, panting.

RUTH. Guy!

GUY (*not looking up*). I am busy, Ruth.

RUTH. Guy, they have got my father. The soldiers, Guy. They've got my father.

GUY (*still bending*). Yes, I can hear.

RUTH. My father!

GUY (*leaning back in chair*). Why not? Your father joined the rest.

RUTH. What will they do to him ?

GUY. The law has a strong arm, Ruth.

RUTH. You mean——

GUY. Fools pay for their folly.

RUTH (*coming to him*). Guy, Guy, you will not let my father—— Oh——

GUY. Captain Lascelles has charge of all the prisoners till they are handed over to the civil authorities. If you wish to communicate with any of them, you must apply to him.

RUTH. But—Guy—they say the prisoners will be hanged.

GUY. It's more than likely.

RUTH. And my father——

GUY (*rising and standing with back to fire*). Arson is a hanging matter, Ruth. If your father chose to be a riotous incendiary, he must pay the penalty.

RUTH (*standing by table*). Guy, don't you love me ?

GUY. I have loved you, Ruth. I find you are the kind of woman men do love.

RUTH. What do you mean ?

GUY. There was a man to-night, Ruth, upon the moors.

RUTH. That ? But you know.

GUY. I am waiting to know.

RUTH. I went to save your life from him. I heard him speak in here, last night, when you and Mr. Heppenstall had gone in there, and he—he threatened and——

GUY. Threatened ! He ! And if he did, do you imagine it a woman's job to guard my life ?

RUTH. He threatened and he meant to do.

GUY. And what had you to do with him ?

RUTH. That is all over now.

GUY. It may be, but it has left its mark. Why did you go to him?

RUTH. I went because of what is past. Before I knew you, Guy, I knew him and——

GUY. You went to beg my life. From him, your lover, Martin Kelsall!

RUTH. Yes. He was my lover once.

GUY. A fine strong lover for you, wife of mine. A brave, grand lover, Ruth.

RUTH. Oh, you outfaced him in the quarry there. I saw the fear he had for you.

GUY. The starveling rat.

RUTH. Yes, starveling and a coward when he met you face to face, you with your strength and he an ill and starving man. Maybe it's easy for a strong man to be brave, but, in the end, he won. His starveling brain had made a plan. His——

GUY. Damn him. Do you defend him?

RUTH. No, Guy, I don't defend. I prove him dangerous. I prove that when I went, I went with reason. I prove that if he fooled me there, he fooled you here. The factory is burnt.

GUY. I am not talking of the factory just now. It's you I'm talking of. You say you prove him dangerous. You do. You say he fooled you there, me here. I am not certain that he did not fool us both at once, up there.

RUTH. Guy! But I told you.

GUY. What?

RUTH. You came in time.

GUY. In time for what? I want to know. It seems to me that you were ready——

RUTH. Yes. I was ready, ready then and there to save your life.

GUY. At the price—— ?

RUTH. To save your life. You see, I loved you, Guy.

GUY. You loved me !

RUTH. Could I have proved it more ?

GUY. There is a price which no man pays for life. You got his pistol from him. How ?

RUTH. By promising. And then you came. Guy, Guy, I loved you and I wanted you to live.

GUY. And you ?

RUTH. The quarry cliff is steep. I should have died.

GUY. Come here, Ruth. Look at me. Look into my eyes and tell me that again.

(She comes to him.)

RUTH. I should have died. Death's easy, Guy.

GUY. Yes. I believe you now. *(From her.)* By heaven, what a fool you are.

RUTH. A loving fool, then, Guy.

GUY. A fool in love's the worst of fools. There, there it's over, Ruth. But Kelsall ? Yes, I've got Kelsall. Kelsall shall pay for this.

RUTH. They'll hang him, Guy ?

GUY. Oh yes, they'll hang what's left.

RUTH. What's left ?

GUY. When I have done with Martin Kelsall, the gallows will be welcome to the rest.

RUTH. Guy, you——

GUY. Be careful, Ruth, or you will have me doubting you again.

RUTH. And there's my father, Guy. Is he to hang as well ?

GUY. You come of a race of fools.

RUTH. I believe that you can save him, Guy. For my sake, won't you let that old man live. My father, Guy? Your father's friend when they were young together.

GUY. Come here, Ruth. I'll strike a bargain with you.
(*He sits.*)

RUTH. A bargain?

GUY. Yes, for your father's neck. We mustn't let our father hang, must we, my pretty?

RUTH. If what you want is in my power to grant——

GUY. It's in your power. We'll have a straightening out of things, my girl. They've got askew, and this night's work of yours is just the last knot that you'll tie. You meddle, girl. You are come of weavers' stock and weavers tend to meddling. You used to ask me questions, you worried me about the factory. I stopped your asking, but I didn't change your ways. You kept them, saved them up for this fine piece of meddling of to-night. Now Ruth, it's this. You're my wife. You're Mrs Barlow, not Ruth Butterworth. Your thoughts should be of my making, not your father's. You will give up attending other people's business and attend your own. Maybe if you had done that earlier we should have seen by now some sign of what I'm looking for from you. You know what that is, lass. I want an heir. Give me obedience, my Ruth, bear me a son, and this night's work shall be forgotten.

RUTH. And, my father?

GUY. Your father shall escape the hangman, Ruth. What do you say to me?

RUTH. I—I will be your slave. (*She sinks at his feet in utter surrender.*)

GUY. You will be my wife. You won't ask questions.

You will know that what I do is good because I do it, and the sooner you bring me an heir the better I shall be pleased with you.

RUTH. That is in God's hand, Guy.

GUY. Aye, but meddling women make bad mothers, Ruth.

RUTH. I will not meddle more. I'll be your—your wife.

(*Enter CAPTAIN LASCELLES. RUTH struggles up.*)

CAPTAIN. Oh, I—I beg your pardon—I——

GUY (*rising and pouring wine*). Come in, Captain, come in.

(*CAPTAIN closes door and advances.*)

Captain, a loving cup. I apologize to the British Army and congratulate you on the round-up. (*Holding glass out.*)

CAPTAIN (*taking glass*). Why, thank you, Mr. Barlow. Here's your health, sir. To your eyes, madam.

GUY (*drinking*). A very gallant piece of work, Captain.

(*They sit at table. RUTH is by fire, looking into it.*)

CAPTAIN. Gallant? Nay, to my mind, sir, the policing of your valley is no work for a man of Wellington's. It is a sorry soldier who takes pleasure in the harrying of half-starved weavers.

GUY. All work well done is good work, Captain.

CAPTAIN. I do not share your pleasure in this night. And let me tell you, sir, your father's with me in the view I take.

GUY. My father? Aye, old men resent a change, especially a change that is forced on them. But for myself, why, good out of evil, captain. A new factory, up to date in every detail with new machines to cut my wage list down, and——

CAPTAIN. Do you think it's safe to build again ?

GUY. Safe ?

CAPTAIN. Yes. Will they let you ?

GUY. The weavers ? Man, they'll help.

CAPTAIN. Will they now ?

GUY. They will come and ask to be allowed to help. They'll sit round watching stone go on to stone and thank their God for every story raised.

CAPTAIN. That's not their mood to-night.

GUY. To-night they have a supper in them, They'll be starving then.

RUTH (*without turning*). Starving !

CAPTAIN. You are somewhat drastic, sir.

GUY. Well, sir, and are not you ? In the army you've the noble institution of flogging to keep your men to heel. We can't flog weavers. It's against the law and so we have to keep them disciplined by other means. And now, captain, about your prisoners.

CAPTAIN. Yes ?

GUY. You would count them carefully ? Suppose, I mean, that one were missing. Would you take it very much to heart ?

CAPTAIN. On the contrary, sir, I should be glad to see the whole lot go.

GUY. What, all of them ? And go away with nothing to show for your night's work ?

CAPTAIN. I don't regard this as a creditable night, Mr. Barlow. Your father was saying just now that the simplest way is to let them all escape. They will have had the scare of their lives and are not likely to forget the lesson.

RUTH (*turning to GUY*). Oh, if you would !

GUY (*ignoring her*). And what did you say ?

CAPTAIN. I agreed with him.

GUY. You're a man of heart, Captain. Only you would be cashiered.

CAPTAIN. I would risk cashiering. And I may remind you, sir, that it is not you, but your father, who's the magistrate.

GUY. I speak here for my father. We settled that between us half an hour ago.

CAPTAIN. That's true. He sent me to you.

GUY. On your errand of—mercy?

CAPTAIN. Yes.

GUY (*rising*). Captain, oblige me by sending two of your prisoners here. Butterworth and Kelsall. One of them may escape. He is my wife's father.

CAPTAIN (*rising*). Your wife's father! I'm sorry, Mrs. Barlow. I had so few men that I had to bind the prisoners, and your father must be pinioned like the rest.

GUY. He acted like the rest. I will see to his bindings, Captain.

CAPTAIN. And as to the other question?

GUY. What other?

CAPTAIN. Letting them all escape.

GUY. There is no other question.

CAPTAIN. Your father, sir——

GUY. Your duty, Captain Lascelles, is to hand your prisoners to the authorities to be dealt with as the law provides. Meanwhile, send me the men I want.

CAPTAIN. Very well.

(*Exit* CAPTAIN LASCELLES. GUY sits to his plans. After a moment RUTH comes to him and touches his arm.)

RUTH. Guy!

GUY (*not looking up*). Don't go, Ruth. I want you here.

RUTH. I was not going, but——

GUY. Then oblige me by silence. These plans of mine must reach an architect to-morrow. (*Takes knife from pocket and erases something on plan.*) And the new machinery must be ordered to-night.

RUTH. Guy, how soon will the new factory be built?

GUY (*still at work*). With luck, six months, if frost does not hold up the masons.

RUTH. Six months. Six wintry months and in the mean time all the weavers——

GUY. Those who are not hanged will be starving for their sins. I've told you to keep quiet, Ruth.

RUTH. I have kept quiet, Guy, kept quiet while you made me love you like your dog because you warmed my body well and fed me till my eyes were closed with fat and all my will was lulled to sleep. I asked you questions of the factory, and when you gave me poetry books to read, I read them and forgot. You told me not to meddle and I have obeyed. I gave up asking questions till in all the valley there was none more ignorant than me. Than me, who——

GUY (*rising*). Than you who made a bargain with me here. Is this your way of keeping it?

RUTH. Guy, let me ask you things. If it is the last time, for just this once, be kind and tell me what you mean to do.

GUY. If it is the last time? Ruth, I keep my bargains. There is your father's life at stake.

RUTH. Still, I must know. For the sake of our future, Guy, I must know what you mean to do. I have been quiet, Guy. I will again. I might have spoken now while Captain Lascelles spoke with you. I kept my silence then. But

tell me, Guy. It's you who are the master now? You, not your father?

GUY. It is I.

RUTH. Lord of the Valley. Master of their lives. Guy, Guy, what will you do with them?

GUY. Break them.

RUTH. Your father would be merciful.

GUY. Old men grow soft with age.

RUTH. Have you not broken them enough? Have they not starved for you till desperation made them turn and do the deed they did to-night?

GUY. They did the deed. They turned. Therefore they are not broken, Ruth. But, by the Lord, they're going to be. I'll have them meek. I'll crush their spirits till their children's children rue the day their fathers tried to thwart Guy Barlow.

RUTH. Yes. You can do it. You've the strength.

GUY. And the power. The dogs don't know their master yet.

RUTH. You can do it, Guy. But will you?

GUY. Will I?

RUTH. Hear me. A woman can't do much. A woman's handicapped. But what she can do, Guy, all that I'll do to——

GUY. Where is your bargain now?

RUTH. Yes. I made a bargain, didn't I? I bargained for my father's life. My life for his.

GUY. Your—life?

RUTH. I said I'd be your slave. I said that I would give you sons. I said I would not ask you questions.

GUY. And you have asked. You have asked and had your answers. For the last time, Ruth,

RUTH. Yes. I shall ask no more. I shall——

GUY. What ?

(Enter soldier with MATTHEW and MARTIN, whose wrists are bound behind their backs.)

SOLDIER. Captain Lascelles' orders, sir.

GUY. Thank you. You may go.

(Soldier salutes and goes. RUTH snatches knife from table and cuts MATTHEW'S bonds.)

RUTH. Father, you shall not be bound.

GUY *(watching cynically and firmly taking knife from her.)*

No. Our father must not be in bonds, must he ? But we will stop there, Ruth. It is not Kelsall's turn just yet.

MATTHEW. I am not wishful to be treated differently from the rest.

GUY. No ? And yet, do you know, Father-in-law Butterworth, you are going to be. Martyrs are going cheap to-night. I have another use than martyrdom for you.

MATTHEW. Well, seemingly, I'm in your hands.

GUY. You are precisely in my hands, Father-in-law. What would you say now if I let you go scot free for this ?

RUTH *(half-incredulously)*. Guy !

MATTHEW. I'd say the wench had talked to you.

GUY. Yes. She has talked. And then, Butterworth ? After I had let you go ?

MATTHEW. You want a promise from me ? Well, I'll make you none until you put away from you the abomination of machinery. I'll fight till I can fight no more against your factories and ugliness. I'll fight for honest craftsmanship and joy and pride in work until there's not a factory left in the land, until we've made an end to all the makers

and the users of machines that take the weaver's handiwork away, until——

RUTH (*holding him back as he advances towards GUY*). Father! Guy has the power of life or death. You could be hanged for what you've done to-night.

GUY. And dead men burn no factories, Butterworth.

MATTHEW. Dead men can speak, speak from their graves back to the living, Mr. Guy.

GUY. I have told you you are not to die. You're going to live, because I will it so.

MATTHEW. And ask me to submit?

GUY. I don't remember asking. I know you will submit.

MATTHEW. Never.

GUY. The door is there. Get out of it and go. You'll not be stayed. Go out and show yourself alive. Go out and prove to all the valley that Guy Barlow has the power of life or death.

MATTHEW. So that's the use you have for me. To show myself a coward, who——

GUY. To show yourself sent back to life by me.

MATTHEW. To life! The life you send me to is not worth having.

GUY. Perhaps that's why I send you back to it.

MATTHEW. No. I will——

RUTH. You will think of my mother.

MARTIN. Go, Butterworth. There is still work for you to do.

MATTHEW. To take my life from him!

RUTH. He will not taunt you with it, father.

GUY (*going impatiently to door and opening it*). Go, man, before I change my mind, and thank your God it's you I choose to take my message out—the message that Guy

Barlow has the power to send men to the gallows or the loom.
For you, the loom. For him, the gallows. Go.

(RUTH goes with MATTHEW to door.)

RUTH. Go, father.

GUY. Ruth, not you.

RUTH. No.

(Gently pushing MATTHEW out. He goes. GUY closes door, then crosses to window and throws curtains back. Then turns bullyingly on MARTIN.)

GUY. Well, Martin Kelsall, do you like your handiwork ?
A pretty bonfire for a winter's night. Look at it, Kelsall.
Drink it in, for it is like to be the last you'll see of earthly
fire. They don't waste coal in jail.

MARTIN. I have two things will keep me warm.

GUY. You will need them both before the hangman fits a
noose about your neck.

MARTIN. Two things, Guy Barlow. Hatred. Hatred
of you and satisfaction for to-night. We've made a clean
sweep of your factory.

GUY. And I could almost find it in my heart to shake your
dirty hand for doing it. You've left the less to clear away
before we can commence rebuilding.

MARTIN. Rebuilding !

GUY. Why, did you think we'd sit down still and mourn ?
You will not live to see it, Kelsall, but there will be a grand
new factory in six months' time. There'll be machines
which eat up work as if they liked it. Machines to do
the work of many men. They're cunning things, those new
machines. They are not rebellious and a little child can
guide them by the hand. Kelsall, I think a factory should

have a name. I shall call mine the Phoenix Factory, because it's going to rise more glorious upon the ashes you have sown.

MARTIN. Oh, you can kill me——

GUY. And I shall. I'm not like you. I'm not afraid to kill.

MARTIN. But my work will go on.

GUY. It will. And shall I tell you what that work of yours will be? Death, Kelsall, Death and——

MARTIN. Yes, death for me, but for the others—those for whom I give my life—there will be——

GUY. There will be the slower death which you escape by hanging. They will thank you for it, won't they, Kelsall? While they starve, they'll bless your name for burning down the factory that brought them bread.

MARTIN. It did not bring them bread enough for life.

GUY. Oh, some of them will live the winter through and come to work my new looms in the spring. They'll be the strong men who survive, strong weavers for my factory and, by the Lord, they will be meek. They will have learnt the cost of yonder carnival. They——

RUTH. Stop, Guy.

GUY. What?

RUTH. I'm telling you to stop your blasphemy.

GUY. You asked me questions, Ruth. I thought you liked to listen to my plans.

RUTH. Yes. I have asked you questions and I have my answer now.

GUY. True, but you interrupt me, Ruth. You interrupt my telling Mr. Kelsall of the future which he will not be fortunate enough to see.

RUTH. You are baiting a helpless man, and——

GUY. If you prefer to go, the door is open. I've got a crow to pick with Kelsall here.

RUTH. I do not prefer to go. I told you what a woman could, I'd do to stop your infamies.

GUY (*sneering*). Women can do so much.

RUTH. Sometimes they can do much. Martin, I am glad that they have bound your hands. Glad of it now, because——

MARTIN (*understanding*). No. No. Not that way, Ruth.

RUTH. Is there another?

MARTIN. Yes. Loose my hands and I——

GUY. I think not, Kelsall. So. You are Ruth and Martin to each other, are you? And Ruth met Martin on the moors to-night. Ruth is my wife, and Martin—Martin is—— (*He approaches with fist clenched to strike.*)

RUTH (*in front of MARTIN, protecting him*). Martin is the man I should have married if——

GUY (*restraining himself with the mastery of one who feels he can take his time*). If you hadn't seen a better chance in me.

MARTIN. A better chance!

RUTH (*with a protective arm across his chest, watching GUY by fire, over her shoulder*). Yes, Martin, for it was a chance.

MARTIN (*bitterly*). What have you made of it?

RUTH. Oh, in the end it comes to this. Could it have come to any other thing?

MARTIN. We might have had this time together, Ruth. Some sort of happiness, some little sort.

RUTH. I've had some happiness with him. The sort of happiness you have when you're asleep. I loved him in my sleep, and in my dreams he seemed a proper man to love. But you—you've had no happiness. You have been

lonely, Martin, lonely and cold and hungry. You should have had me working with you all this while. I've been a traitor to you in my sleep. But now—now I am awake and in the death to which they'll make you go, you shall be stainless to the end. And in their hearts you'll live again—the man who planned and did and died upon a gallows for the people's sake. I will keep you pure for that, my Martin. I—

GUY (*from fire*). I am being very patient, Ruth.

RUTH (*to MARTIN, not turning*). You see, I've had my happiness, so it is right that I should pay. (*She turns to GUY.*)

GUY. So? You have finished your farewell?

RUTH. Yes, Guy, it is all over now.

GUY (*suddenly ferocious*). Then come here, Ruth. Come here and scream. Scream loudly, Ruth, or I shall cheat the hangman of his prey before they drag me off.

RUTH (*between them*). You shall not touch him, Guy. A fettered man.

GUY. Shan't! Shall I not? Come to me, Ruth, I tell you. Come away. I'm master here.

RUTH. Yes. You are master here where your father was. And if you die, your father would be master still.

GUY. You are standing in my way.

RUTH. Your father's merciful and you—you shall not have your vengeance, Guy. The hard, hard laws will take revenge and men will pay in blood and tears and life for what they've done to-night. You shall not make the women pay in agony. (*She takes pistol from table and points.*) You shall not starve the valley, Guy.

GUY. So. That is what you mean. The pistol's loaded, and your aim is true. (*He comes round table.*)

RUTH. I do not shake with hunger, Guy.

GUY. Not by my death nor by a hundred deaths of such as me will you delay the spread of factories. They will go on—go on—I may not see it, but—— (*He leaps.*)

RUTH. You will not see it, Guy. (*She fires.*) And I—I only see the valley here and you who would be master of their lives.

GUY (*falling*). You—you've got me, Ruth.

RUTH (*dropping pistol*). The plans. The plans. (*She burns plans in fire.*)

GUY. Ruth!

RUTH. Yes. (*By him.*) I have killed the man I loved. Lest he became the beast I'd hate.

MARTIN. Ruth! For God's sake, loose my hands.

RUTH (*looking at GUY*). Good-bye, Martin. They will be coming for me now.

(CAPTAIN LASCELLES, EPHRAIM and JOHN are seen in the doorway.)

CURTAIN.

ZACK
A CHARACTER COMEDY

ZACK.
A CHARACTER COMEDY

CHARACTERS.

PAUL MUNNING.
ZACHARIAH MUNNING.
JOE WRIGLEY.
JAMES ABBOTT.
THOMAS MOWATT
HARRY SHOEBRIDGE
MRS. MUNNING.
VIRGINIA CAVENDER.
MARTHA WRIGLEY.
SALLY TEALE

ACT I.—*Mrs. Munning's Parlour—an afternoon in early June.*

ACT II.—*The Refreshment Room—morning a fortnight later.*

ACT III.—*Mrs. Munning's Parlour—evening a month later.*

In the Village of Little Hulton, Lancashire.

ACT I.

The parlour in MRS. MUNNING'S house, the window of which looks out to a bowling green. The room is furnished with chairs and sofa, upholstered in horsehair. It is not quite shabby, but well used. The ornaments crowded on the mantelpiece are Mid-Victorian survivals. There is a book-shelf on the wall above the bureau. The wall-paper is flowered ; there is no gas, but lamp on table. In the window is a small model in plaster of a wedding-cake. It should be quite small and unostentatious. Men's coats are hung behind door. The light is of a spring afternoon.

As the curtain rises, MRS. MUNNING, who is fifty-five and hard featured, is dusting the ornaments on the mantel. She is in her best clothes, which are black, protected by a dirty apron. She looks at the clock impatiently. It strikes four. She goes to window and looks out. She mutters, " And time too," and goes to door. She opens it and speaks through it.

MRS MUNNING. Get a move on, now. Take your things off in there and come along quick.

SALLY (off). Yes, Mrs. Munning.

MRS. MUNNING. Hurry up when I tell you. This is a nice time of day to come.

SALLY (entering, a pretty, country girl of eighteen in print

frock). You told me to come o' Thursday and Thursday 'tis.

MRS. MUNNING. It's been Thursday a long time.

SALLY. You never said no hour. And mother said to me, she says——

MRS. MUNNING. Never mind what she said. You take hold of that duster and let me see you shape.

SALLY. Yes, Mrs. Munning. (*She takes it and dusts at mantel.*)

MRS. MUNNING. Take care of those ornaments now, Sally.

SALLY. Now don't you fret yourself. I'm not the breaking sort. You can stop my wages for all I'm like to break.

MRS. MUNNING. That's of course.

SALLY. I was telling you. Mother, she says to me, you stay at home for your dinner, she says, and that'll save Mrs. Munning a bit; and I stayed willing because we'd trotters to-day and they're a dish that I've a relish for.

MRS. MUNNING. You could have gone home to your dinner.

SALLY. And I couldn't. Not when I'd once begun with you. Meals and all, you said, and a bargain's a bargain.

MRS. MUNNING. Well, you should have come this morning. Leaving me all to do.

SALLY. Mother didn't know you were in a hurry.

MRS. MUNNING. She ought to, then. I told her. I told her that when Miss Cavender came this afternoon I wanted her to take you for a regular maid. And don't you forget it neither, Sally, and go giving it away you're not always here.

SALLY. Suppose she asks me, Mrs. Munning?

MRS. MUNNING. If you'll shape properly, she'll never think but what you're regular. That's what I wanted you

early for. To run you round and show you the ways of the house.

SALLY. Eh, but I don't need showing. Didn't I spring-clean for you last year? I'll manage easy.

MRS. MUNNING. You'll have to now. And don't come asking me where things are kept, not when Miss Cavender can hear you ask.

SALLY. Oh, don't you worry, Mrs. Munning. If any one gives it away to Miss Cavender that I've not been here for years and years, it'll not be me. Find my way about a strange house blindfold, I can. It's a natural gift.

(PAUL MUNNING enters, a man of thirty, well-built, but with meanness stamped upon an otherwise not unattractive face. He wears light clothes with a grey bowler hat, and a button-hole.)

SALLY. Here's Mr. Paul. Good-afternoon, sir.

(PAUL grunts. MRS. MUNNING turns.)

PAUL. Has she come yet?

MRS. MUNNING. Not yet. Have you——?

(PAUL indicates SALLY.)

Um. This room will do now, Sally.

SALLY. It will, though I says it that did it.

MRS. MUNNING. Did you! I fancied I did it myself.

SALLY. You did the rough, Mrs. Munning, but I always say it's the finishing touch that counts with dusting and I reckon I did that.

MRS. MUNNING. Well, now you can go to the kitchen and get the kettle on for tea.

SALLY. You'll be having your tea in here, won't you?

MRS. MUNNING. Yes.

SALLY. All right. You needn't raise a hand to it. I'll see to everything.

(SALLY goes out.)

MRS. MUNNING. She's a Miss Know-all, she is.

PAUL. Won't she do?

MRS. MUNNING. She'll have to do. Virginia's got to think we keep a maid, and Sally's the only one who'd come at our price.

PAUL (*sitting, gloomily*). It's great expense.

MRS. MUNNING. No helping that. It's got to be. We can't have Virginia going home and telling all her aunt's too poor to keep a servant. Did you get that order?

PAUL. No.

MRS. MUNNING. Not Taylor's?

PAUL. Wilson, of Norton Parva, is catering for Mrs. Taylor's wedding.

MRS. MUNNING. You mean to say that Wilson got there first?

PAUL. He hadn't been.

MRS. MUNNING. Then how's he got the order?

PAUL. He's going to get it. It's the same old tale. They'd heard our weddings aren't as pleasant as they used to be. Knew we were nearest, but they thought they'd give Wilson a chance. A good ten pounds gone from us there.

MRS. MUNNING. Well, I don't know.

PAUL. And I don't know. If I knew I'd alter it. We're doing things no different from what we always did, and yet it's got about our style's gone off. It's not gone off.

MRS. MUNNING. I'm sure it's not. What do they say? Do they tell you anything?

PAUL. Folks with a wedding in their house are too uplifted to say much. They don't explain. What I make out is we're not so hearty as we used to be.

MRS. MUNNING. Hearty?

PAUL. I've heard it said so. God knows what it means. I'm sure I try to be hearty. It's prejudice, and nothing else.

MRS. MUNNING. And word's passed round against us.

PAUL. Seems so.

MRS. MUNNING. It's very bad, Paul.

PAUL. Bad? Don't I know it's bad? Couldn't be worse if it tried. We'll have the shutters up altogether at this rate. The joinery business doesn't keep us alive, and if the catering goes to ruin, we'll go along with it. That's all.

MRS. MUNNING. That's all, is it? Can't you up and fight it? You're losing heart.

PAUL. Enough to make me, too. You can fight a thing you see, but you can't fight a prejudice. It's like hitting air. I tell you what, mother, this is no time to have a guest, and a guest that calls for a servant.

MRS. MUNNING. We can't afford to lose a chance.

PAUL. Chance of what?

MRS. MUNNING. There's money in that family, and when my sister writes to me and says Virginia's not been well and needs the country air, I say it's folly not to have her here, cost what it may.

PAUL. There's money and they'll keep it to themselves.

MRS. MUNNING. I'm not the one to go expecting much, but you never know, and it 'ud be no more than sisterly of Annie to remember me in her will.

PAUL. Oh well, she's coming and we're in for it. How long before we see the back of her?

MRS. MUNNING. The doctor told her mother it'll take a month to put her right.

PAUL. A month! A month! Good Lord! There's Sally at six shillings a week wages, that's one pound four, and as much again for keep, is two pounds eight, and Virginia an invalid 'll cost——

MRS. MUNNING. She's not an invalid. She's just run down.

PAUL. I know, and the Lord knows what it'll cost in fancy goods to wind her up. You'll see no change from five pounds for this affair.

MRS. MUNNING. I say it's worth it.

PAUL. And I hope you're right.

MRS. MUNNING. We'll see. You'd better change your clothes now, Paul.

PAUL. Change? What for?

MRS. MUNNING. When I married your father I married a joiner and I didn't see cause to tell our Annie that he couldn't make ends meet till I turned to and made a catering business for him as well, me being apprenticed to the confectionery when he came courting me. I didn't tell them and I haven't told to this day.

PAUL. Yes, but if the girl's to stay a month she's bound to know it soon or late.

MRS. MUNNING. Then let her know it late. There's a lot in first impressions.

PAUL. Why, there's Mr. Abbott's wedding-party to-morrow.

MRS. MUNNING. That's not to-day, is it? And we'll send her for a walk to-morrow with Zack, out of the way.

PAUL. About all he's fit for.

MRS. MUNNING. You get your gay clothes changed,

Paul, or she'll ask questions at once. I've tea to see to now. (*Opening door.*) Sally!

SALLY (*appearing with folded cloth*). Now it's all right, Mrs. Munning. I'm finding all I want.

(PAUL goes out. SALLY unfolds and lays on table a ragged white cloth.)

MRS. MUNNING. What do you call that?

SALLY. Tea-cloth, isn't it?

MRS. MUNNING. Yes, for the kitchen. I've got one here for this room. (*She opens drawer in table and takes out cloth.*)

SALLY (*watching*). Oh! Company cloth, like.

MRS. MUNNING. Take the other back.

(SALLY is going.)

And here, Sally.

SALLY (*turning*). Yes, Mrs. Munning.

MRS. MUNNING (*going to window, getting the wedding-cake model*). Take this with you and put it in the dresser drawer.

SALLY. The dresser drawer!

MRS. MUNNING. And mind you close it.

SALLY. Well I—— Oh, I see. You're hiding it.

MRS. MUNNING. We don't want Miss Cavender to be learning everything at once.

SALLY. A nod's as good as a wink to me. I'm mum.

(SALLY goes out, with model and cloth, nodding sagely. MRS. MUNNING carefully spreads the new cloth on table, putting the lamp on the bureau. SALLY re-enters with tray, which she places on the table with a flourish. MRS. MUNNING surveys the tray.)

MRS. MUNNING. That'll not do, Sally.

SALLY. What's wrong now ?

MRS. MUNNING. You mustn't bring in the loaf like that. I want cut bread and butter.

SALLY. Oh, well I call that making work, especially with a loaf like that, all over nobbly bits of crust that's twice as sweet to eat for tearing off.

MRS. MUNNING. And that cress ?

SALLY (*bridling*). Well ?

MRS. MUNNING. It's for cress sandwiches.

SALLY. Oh ? I didn't see no ham nor nothink.

MRS. MUNNING. Cress sandwiches, Sally.

SALLY. How can they be sandwiches without there's meat ?

MRS. MUNNING. Can you cut them or must I do it myself ?

SALLY. Can I ? Of course I can. But I call it a finicky way of doing things. Making a nuisance of a simple job like eating cress. What are fingers for ?

MRS. MUNNING. That will do, Sally. I want no grumbling.

(SALLY takes up loaf and cress.)

SALLY. Grumbling ? There never was nobody less of a grumbler than me. I only speak my mind.

MRS. MUNNING. Well, you get along and cut that bread up now. I want things looking nice. Lord ! If that isn't the fly now. Quick, Sally ! Put those plates down in yonder and get back to the door. (*She hustles SALLY out. By the door she takes off her apron, and pitches it through door.*) Hang that up sometime. Come along, now. Get to the front door.

(SALLY re-enters.)

SALLY. It's all right, Mrs. Munning. Don't you get

yourself into a tear. There's another day to-morrow.

(SALLY crosses to front door and exit.)

(MRS. MUNNING becomes very much the lady of leisure. She pats her hair, takes a book from shelf and sits in arm-chair, reading. SALLY re-enters with VIRGINIA, a well-dressed girl of the urban type with plenty of high spirits and some little indication of recent illness.)

SALLY. The young lady's here.

(SALLY remains, an interested spectator.)

MRS. MUNNING (marking her place in the book, and rising). Well, so this is Virginia. How you've grown!

VIRGINIA. How are you, Aunt Elizabeth?

MRS. MUNNING. I'm strong and hearty, child. It's you that's not.

VIRGINIA. Oh, I'm all right now, aunt.

MRS. MUNNING. You're pale.

VIRGINIA. But not for long in this air of yours. There isn't much the matter with me.

MRS. MUNNING. Your mother wrote a different tale from that.

VIRGINIA. Mother's a dear old fuss.

MRS. MUNNING. How is she?

VIRGINIA. She's splendid, thanks.

MRS. MUNNING. Well, give Sally your coat and sit down.

VIRGINIA. Thanks.

(SALLY takes her coat, then stands examining it.)

MRS. MUNNING. That's right. And now, Virginia——

VIRGINIA. Jenny, please, aunt.

MRS. MUNNING. Jenny!

VIRGINIA. Virginia's no name to live with.

MRS. MUNNING. Well, as you like. Why don't you sit?

VIRGINIA. I didn't pay the flyman.

MRS. MUNNING. As if we'd let you! It'll be a pleasure to Paul to see to that. You'll remember Paul?

VIRGINIA. Very vaguely. As a tiny boy.

MRS. MUNNING. He's a big man now. He'll be helping the flyman up with your boxes, only we don't hear them because this house is so extraordinarily well-built you can't hear sounds in it at all. It's a perfect refuge of peace. Just what you want to cure your nerves with quiet and——
(Several loud bumps are heard above. MRS. MUNNING looks disconcerted.)

VIRGINIA (*quickly*). I'm afraid my box is very heavy.

MRS. MUNNING (*recovering*). Oh, Paul won't mind. He's wonderfully strong. Will you have tea now or would you rather go to your room first? Sally shall show you.

VIRGINIA (*rising*). Thank you.

MRS. MUNNING (*speaking at SALLY*). Our guest room is directly over here.

(VIRGINIA *nods and goes out.*)

SALLY. That's your room, Mrs. Munning.

MRS. MUNNING. You keep that to yourself.

(SALLY *nods, and goes out after VIRGINIA. MRS. MUNNING fusses a moment at the tea table, then suddenly thinking, goes to the window and opens it.*)

(*Calling softly*). Zack! Zack! Zack!

(PAUL *enters. He has changed to a brown suit of country cut.*)

PAUL. What do you want Zack for? (*He speaks at her back.*)

MRS. MUNNING (*turning violently*). Eh? Oh, it's you.

PAUL. Yes. What's to do?

MRS. MUNNING. I've had so much on hand with that Sally turning up so late that it slipped my mind about Zack.

PAUL. What about Zack?

MRS. MUNNING. I've forgotten to warn him.

PAUL. Warn?

MRS. MUNNING. About the catering, and Sally and so on. If we don't make it as plain to him as Monday's dinner he'll give us away in the inside of two minutes. You know what Zack is.

PAUL. I'd leave him alone. He's safer out of the way than in it.

MRS. MUNNING. That'll not do. He'll chose the best wrong time for turning up. Trust Zack for doing something awkward.

PAUL (*going L.*). I'll have a look round.

MRS. MUNNING. As like as not the wastrel's sleeping somewhere.

PAUL. Or reading in a book.

MRS. MUNNING. I'll give him read.

(*Enter SALLY.*)

You've been a fine time showing Miss Cavender her room.

(*Exit PAUL.*)

SALLY. I've been helping her undo her box, Mrs. Munning.

MRS. MUNNING. Trust you for prying, I suppose.

SALLY. I didn't look before she asked me. But when I did, I saw some sights. The ironing she'll make. Frills! They're the width of my hand and more.

MRS. MUNNING (*angrily*). Will you go into the kitchen and get those sandwiches cut?

SALLY. I'm going. (*She gets to door, then turns.*) But I'll tell you this much, Mrs. Munning, that there'll be a row of eyes on washing day a-watching me hang Miss Cavender's underlinen on the line. This village hasn't seen such sights before.

MRS. MUNNING. You mind your own business in there and don't waste time. I'll ring for tea. (*She pushes SALLY out, then goes to window.*) Can't you find him, Paul?

PAUL. Not yet. (*He is outside window.*)

MRS. MUNNING. Best leave it, then. If he's asleep he may sleep on till after tea and then we'll tell him quietly.

PAUL. What! Zack sleep while there's eating going on?

MRS. MUNNING. We'll have to chance it, Paul. I want you here when she comes down wherever Zack may be. You didn't see her upstairs?

PAUL. No. Dodged her.

MRS. MUNNING. That's right.

(*PAUL comes from window and enters by door.* MRS. MUNNING closes window, and then arranges table again, fussily.)

PAUL (*grumbling*). Tea in here.

MRS. MUNNING. Why, of course.

(*PAUL sits sulkily in arm-chair, legs outstretched, hands in pocket.*)

PAUL. It's a sight more comfortable in the kitchen. This is a foul upset of all our ways.

MRS. MUNNING. Wait till you see Virginia.

PAUL. I don't need seeing her. I carried up her traps and that's enough to tell me all I want to know.

MRS. MUNNING. A girl must have clothes, Paul.

PAUL. I'd rather carry them than pay for them, that's true. A dressed-up, peeked and pampered town girl with a head full of fancies and——

MRS. MUNNING. I'm sure she isn't peeked.

PAUL. Oh? Isn't she ill, or was her mother lying?

MRS. MUNNING. She's been ill and she's getting better now.

PAUL. That's worse. She'll eat us out of house and home. Convalescents always eat like elephants.

MRS. MUNNING. I wish you'd think ahead.

PAUL. I do. To the grocer's bills she'll make.

MRS. MUNNING. Well, you think to something a bit more pleasant that'll bring a smile to your face. You've a sour look on you sometimes.

PAUL. Enough to make me sour, too.

MRS. MUNNING. I've told you why she's here. It's not because I love her, nor her mother neither, but there's money at that end of the family and I'm a believer in keeping on the sweet side of rich relations and giving Providence a friendly lead.

PAUL. I can look pleasant all right when I'm being photographed with a wedding-group, but looking pleasant for a month on end! It'll take some doing, I give you my word.

(VIRGINIA enters in a light spring frock. PAUL rises.)

MRS. MUNNING. This is Paul, Jenny.

VIRGINIA. I'm very glad to see you, Cousin Paul. It's a long time since we met.

PAUL (not ungraciously). I don't remember meeting you at all.

MRS. MUNNING (up to bureau, from which she gets a large

old-fashioned portrait album). Don't you? I'll show you when you met. Sit down, Jenny.

VIRGINIA (*sitting*). Thanks.

MRS. MUNNING (*sitting by her with the album*). PAUL *stands behind*). I've got you both in this album. Taken together.

PAUL. Oh?

(MRS. MUNNING *finds the photograph.*)

VIRGINIA. Oh yes. Mother has one of that at home.

MRS. MUNNING. It was taken at your house. Look at it, Paul. Weren't you a loving pair?

PAUL. Is that me?

MRS. MUNNING. That's you.

VIRGINIA. Don't you look funny?

PAUL. You a baby and me a little lad. No wonder I'd forgotten it.

MRS. MUNNING. You've both come on a bit since then. Ring the bell for tea, Paul.

(PAUL *looks surprised, then rings.*)

VIRGINIA (*turning over leaves*). Is this Paul, too?

MRS. MUNNING. Yes. Paul at five. (*Turning*). And there he is at ten, and there at twelve and——

VIRGINIA. Yes. But haven't I another cousin, Aunt Elizabeth?

MRS. MUNNING. Yes. Yes, but——

PAUL. He makes a bad photograph.

VIRGINIA. Some people do. But they are often all the better in the flesh. Will he be in to tea?

MRS. MUNNING. Well——

VIRGINIA. Isn't he at home?

(SALLY *enters with tea, sandwiches, etc.*)

PAUL. Oh yes. But we're very busy in the joiner's shop just now.

(SALLY stops short and looks at him.)

MRS. MUNNING. Come along, Sally.

VIRGINIA. Oh, dear! But of course I'm glad to know your business does so well. I mean I suppose it does if my cousin is too busy to come in to tea.

MRS. MUNNING. We'll send for him. Sally, tell Mr. Zachary to come.

SALLY. Mr. Zachary?

MRS. MUNNING. Yes.

SALLY. Do you mean Zack?

MRS. MUNNING. Tell Mr. Zachary tea's ready and his cousin's come.

SALLY. But I don't know where he is. He's such a one for getting into holes and corners and——

PAUL. You can find him, can't you?

SALLY. I can try. And I'll start with his bed, and all. It's ten to one he's lying on it.

MRS. MUNNING. Sally, he's——

SALLY. Are you finding him or am I? Because if it's me, I'll look in the likeliest place first.

(Exit SALLY.)

MRS. MUNNING. You mustn't expect town courtesies from our country servants, Jenny. May I give you sugar?

VIRGINIA. One lump, please.

MRS. MUNNING. And cream?

VIRGINIA. Thanks.

MRS. MUNNING. Paul, Jenny's cup.

(PAUL hands it clumsily. While they are occupied the door

opens, and ZACK enters. He is younger than PAUL, but neglect makes him look middle-aged. He wears spectacles and a beard and is dressed shabbily with a carpenter's apron on. Under his left arm is the wedding-cake model.)

ZACK. I knew that was the smell of tea-time, but what are we having it in here for ?

MRS. MUNNING. Zack, don't you see your cousin ?

(MRS. MUNNING pours tea, etc. VIRGINIA rises.)

ZACK. Why, if I'd not forgotten all about her. I am a careless chap. Do you know, Miss Virginia, I forgot to come in to dinner one day last week.

PAUL. That doesn't often happen.

ZACK. It 'ud better not, neither. Gives you a nasty sinking feel towards tea-time to go without your dinner. Well, how are you, Miss Virginia ? I'm pleased to meet you.

(Till now VIRGINIA has stood slightly embarrassed and amused. He comes forward now, and VIRGINIA puts out her hand.)

MRS. MUNNING. You'll wash your hand before you touch Jenny's.

ZACK. Maybe I ought. I'm not so frequent at the soap as I might be.

VIRGINIA. I think we'll shake hands as you are.

ZACK. Will you ? That's hearty.

(They shake hands. VIRGINIA sits, ZACK is about to.)

But—— Oh, Lord !

VIRGINIA. What is it ?

ZACK *(fingering his coat)*. I'm not dressed up for a parlour tea. I—— Eh ?

(PAUL is taking the model from under ZACK's arm.)

Oh, yes. Do you know where I found that?

MRS. MUNNING. Put it down.

ZACK (*up to window with it*). I'll put it in its place. But do you know where I found it?

MRS. MUNNING. Never mind, Zack. It doesn't matter. (To JENNY.) It's only a little window ornament, Jenny.

ZACK (*imperviously*). I found that on the kitchen dresser. Picked it up as I came through.

(SALLY enters. MRS. MUNNING's feelings get too much for her. She rises to meet SALLY. PAUL sees and distracts VIRGINIA'S attention.)

PAUL. Will you have more bread and butter, Jenny?

VIRGINIA. Thank you, Paul.

SALLY. I can't find—— (*Seeing ZACK.*) Oh, there you are!

MRS. MUNNING (*to SALLY*). I told you to put that model in the dresser drawer.

SALLY. And you told me to cut sandwiches and bread and I've one pair of hands and not a hundred. I left it atop till I'd a minute to spare, and if it's not where I left it some one's moved it. It didn't walk.

(*She crosses speaking and exit. MRS. MUNNING returns speechlessly to her seat.*)

ZACK. Well, I'll change my coat and chance it.

(*He changes to a slightly less old coat which hangs behind the door.*)

Parlour ways is parlour ways.

VIRGINIA. I do hope you're not going to make a stranger of me, Aunt Elizabeth.

ZACK. And that's no use in here. (*Taking off the apron.*)

PAUL. You'll have to make allowances for Zack, Jenny.

VIRGINIA. Is he a little——?

PAUL. We don't let it go beyond the family, of course.

VIRGINIA. I hope I'm one of you.

PAUL. He was born lazy. That's what's the matter.

ZACK (*returning to table, sitting and eating. ZACK can talk and eat at once*). I've done a job of work to-day and chance it. Mended that pig-stye at Ballbrook farm.

PAUL. Did you? I daresay there was all of ten minutes' work in that.

ZACK. Took me a couple of hour.

MRS. MUNNING. Then I hoped you charged according.

ZACK. I charged a shilling.

MRS. MUNNING. For a couple of hour! It's worth half a crown.

ZACK. I charged what I thought fair.

MRS. MUNNING. What you——! Oh well, it's done now. Where's the shilling?

ZACK (*feeling*). Oh, it's in my other coat. (*He is about to rise.*)

PAUL. All right. All right. That'll do later.

ZACK. But I can see I've done wrong thing again. It's like this, Miss Virginia, there's some folk born to do right. They can't do the wrong thing if they tried. Like mother and Paul. I'm different. It's just the other way with me. I can't do right.

MRS. MUNNING. You never spoke a truer word.

ZACK. Same time, you know, I have my use. Oh yes, I've got a use.

MRS. MUNNING. I haven't noticed it.

ZACK. I'll tell you then. Suppose a thing goes wrong.

They do sometimes. Very well. It couldn't be Paul and it couldn't be you, because you're born the other way. It's always me. You don't need to look round for some one to put the blame on. You know it's me. And that's a sort of use now, isn't it?

VIRGINIA. Is it?

ZACK. Think of the time it saves. I'm always handy to be cussed at. Like a cat, you know. Some folks keep a cat or a dog, and when their feelings get too much to hold, they kick the cat. Well, I'm the cat in this house. *(He speaks entirely without bitterness. It is all accepted fact.)*

PAUL. You sleep like one, but a cat's more use than you. You don't catch mice.

ZACK. I eat more, too. And that's a thing I've tried to master and I can't. You'd be surprised the way I've tried to fight my appetite.

MRS. MUNNING. It's news to me.

ZACK. I own it didn't show. It beat me every time. Eating agrees with me. That's where it is. I'm a natural-born eater and I can't go against nature.

MRS. MUNNING. You needn't talk about it.

ZACK. No. But it's like my other ways. It can't be hid. I'm eating now in the parlour as hearty as if it were in the kitchen. And that's not right, is it?

VIRGINIA. I don't know.

ZACK. Parlour's for eating like you didn't mean it, and only played with food to pass the time. I wish I could pretend with food. But the habit's got too strong a hold on me for that. I'll never be a gentleman.

MRS. MUNNING. That'll do, Zack. Talking about yourself with your mouth full. Jenny's heard quite enough.

PAUL. What would you like to do after tea, Jenny?

VIRGINIA. Anything you like. I must just write to mother first to tell her I got here all right.

MRS. MUNNING. Of course.

VIRGINIA. What time does the post go?

MRS. MUNNING. Six o'clock.

VIRGINIA. I'd better write at once. Then I shall be quite at your disposal, cousin.

PAUL. I thought you and mother might go out. The country's looking quite like spring.

ZACK. I've noticed the celandine's in bud.

MRS. MUNNING. Are you too tired for a walk, Jenny?

VIRGINIA. Not at all.

MRS. MUNNING. Then Paul shall take you. Youth with youth.

PAUL. I'm rather busy at the works.

ZACK. Works! And busy!

PAUL (*silencing him*). Yes, busy. So if you'll excuse me now——

VIRGINIA. Of course.

ZACK. Well! that's a oner.

PAUL. I'll just clear off my work as quickly as I can.

(*Exit PAUL.*)

ZACK. That'll not take long. Busy!

MRS. MUNNING. Paul's busy if you're not. Hadn't you better go and help him?

ZACK. There's no work in to help him at. We've never been so slack.

MRS. MUNNING. It's there if you'll go and look for it, and stop making an exhibition of your laziness to your cousin.

ZACK. I haven't finished my tea.

MRS. MUNNING. Every one else has. It's not our fault

you came in late. Will you write your letter here, Jenny?
(*Indicates bureau.*)

VIRGINIA. I have notepaper upstairs, aunt.

MRS. MUNNING. And you don't use it in this house. We can run to a sheet of notepaper, I should hope. Oh, I was thinking—— (*She opens the portrait album.*)

VIRGINIA. Yes?

MRS. MUNNING. No, there's a better one than that. I'll get it for you. I thought you might like to send your mother a photograph of Paul.

VIRGINIA. I'm sure she'll like to have it, aunt.

MRS. MUNNING. Yes. I'll run upstairs and get it you. I've one up there that's better than any of these.

(*Exit MRS. MUNNING.*)

ZACK. There's queer things happening here to-day, Miss Virginia.

VIRGINIA. Are there? Why do you call me *Miss* Virginia?

ZACK. You're not a married woman, are you?

VIRGINIA. Of course not. But I don't call you Mr. Zachary.

ZACK. Nor nobody else neither. Mr. Zachary! I'd not know who you meant.

VIRGINIA. Why don't you call me Jenny, like the others do?

ZACK. I'm not same as the others, you see.

VIRGINIA. You're my cousin just as much as Paul is.

ZACK. I suppose that's true. There's funny things in nature, too. By gum, there are. To think of the likes of me being own cousin to the likes of you.

VIRGINIA. So you'll call me Jenny.

ZACK. I'd like to, if you think it's quite respectful.

VIRGINIA. Bother respect. I'm Jenny and you're Zack, and that's settled.

ZACK. Well, I never thought—eh, but we're getting on champion, Jenny. I'm still a bit worried in my mind, though.

VIRGINIA. Not about my name?

ZACK. Oh no. Settled's settled. It's, well—this for a start. (*He takes up the model.*) What did mother want to hide it away for?

VIRGINIA. What is it, Zack?

ZACK (*holding it towards her*). You can see what it is.

VIRGINIA. A wedding cake?

ZACK. Aye, but you wouldn't thank me for a slice of this. It's plaster. How are folks to know we are caterers unless they can see that in the window? It's like keeping a pub and putting your sign away.

VIRGINIA. But I thought you were joiners.

ZACK. We crack to be because joinery was father's trade. But it's mother's trade we mostly live by. She's a masterpiece at cooking, only the business isn't thriving. Wedding spreads are the best part of it. Folk are a bit slow at getting wed, some road.

VIRGINIA. I don't think aunt wanted me to know about this, Zack.

ZACK. She's no cause to hide it, then. Father was a bit like me, not much inclined to work, and I reckon I'm proud of my mother for working for two. But things aren't what they were. Folks won't spend like they used to. They buy furniture instead of feasting so much. And our weddings have a bad name, too. I don't know how it is. I'm sure Paul tries,

VIRGINIA. And do you go to them?

ZACK. Not now, with things so bad. I used to go until my clothes wore out—well, they weren't mine at all properly speaking. They were father's when he was alive and then I had them, but I'm hard on clothes somehow. I'm a great expense all ways there are, with being a big eater and all. And when my dress coat gave out at the seams and got that shiny you could see your face in it, mother wouldn't buy me another, and so I don't go now. It's been a sorrow to me, too. I used to take a lot of pleasure in seeing others enjoy themselves. But I wasn't any use, not real use, like Paul. I couldn't boss things like he does. I just was there and tried to tell the old maids that their day would come. But I couldn't even do my fair share of waiting because of a weakness that I have.

VIRGINIA. A weakness! Zack, it isn't—

ZACK. Oh, no. Not that. I'm a teetotaller, Jenny. I get that worked up with the hearty feeling of it that I break the plates. My hand's unsteady. (*Takes plates from table.*) See! That's steady enough? Yes, but get me waiting at a table full of wedding guests and it seems I've got to break the plates to show my pleasure. And it's not wilful. It's not indeed. It's just anxiety to do things right that makes me do them wrong. Mother's quite right. I'm not a bit of good, but I do miss the outings all the same.

VIRGINIA. Poor Zack. I really must get to my letter now, and I think I'll go upstairs after all.

ZACK. I'm not driving you away?

VIRGINIA. Of course you're not.

(MRS. MUNNING enters R.)

MRS. MUNNING. I'm sorry I've been so long, Jenny, I couldn't lay my hands on the one I wanted. There it is. (*Giving photograph.*)

VIRGINIA. Oh! It's very good of him.

MRS. MUNNING. I think your mother will be glad to see it.

VIRGINIA. Yes. (*She isn't interested, and puts the photograph on the table.*) I was just going upstairs to write. It will be quieter in my room.

MRS. MUNNING. Has Zack been talking to you?

ZACK. I did a bit.

MRS. MUNNING. Oh, then I'm not surprised you want some quiet for a change.

VIRGINIA. I thought I'd not be interrupted there. I won't be long. (*Going.*)

MRS. MUNNING. You're forgetting the photograph.

VIRGINIA. I'm sorry, aunt. I was thinking of the other things I had to say to mother. (*She glances at ZACK and goes out.*)

MRS. MUNNING (*reflectively, looking after her*). I'd give something to know what she's saying about our Paul in that letter. (*She turns.*) Why isn't the table cleared? Couldn't you stir yourself to ring the bell for Sally?

ZACK. I didn't know I ought. A servant girl's a novelty to me.

MRS. MUNNING. You didn't let that out to Jenny?

ZACK. Let what out?

MRS. MUNNING. Why, that Sally isn't always here.

ZACK. I don't remember that we mentioned her at all. Aren't we to let that out?

MRS. MUNNING. Of course we're not, you moon-struck natural! What do you think she's here for?

ZACK. Well, I dunno. Unless she's here to do the work that Jenny makes.

MRS. MUNNING. Work! I'd do all Jenny makes with one hand tied behind me. Sally's here for show, but I'll watch she does some work as well. And I've a word to say to her about that model there. And you as well.

ZACK. Yes, mother.

MRS. MUNNING. I'll see her first. You can wait. Your time's worth nothing and I'm paying her for hers. Now don't you dare to stir from here till I come back.

ZACK. No, mother.

(Exit MRS. MUNNING. ZACK stands stock-still for a minute, then his eye catches the last piece of bread and butter. Tempted, he falls and gets it. Then tiptoes to a chair, takes one large bite out of the slice, gets sleepy, half raises the slice for another bite, lets his hand drop and settles as if to sleep. A knock at the door. ZACK half-hears, but decides not to move. The knock repeated. This time he does not hear at all. MARTHA WRIGLEY opens the door, and puts a timid head round it. She enters shyly, half child, half woman of eighteen, slovenly and down at heel. She carries a dress suit over her arm. She sees ZACK and stops.)

MARTHA. Oh! Zack!

ZACK. Eh? *(He rouses slowly, not as if from sleep, but from sloth.)* Who's there?

MARTHA. It's Martha Wrigley. And if you please I knocked, and knocked, and nobody came and so——

ZACK *(stirring lazily in his chair)*. Just when I had a moment for a bit of rest.

MARTHA. I'm sorry, Zack. I am sorry. Only I had to make somebody hear,

ZACK (*noticing the bread in his hand, and finishing it*). It needn't have been me. I can't tell you anything.

MARTHA (*matter of fact, without malice*). No. I know you're nobody here. But you can tell them that are somebody.

ZACK. Tell 'em what?

MARTHA. Oh, Zack, we're in such trouble at home.

ZACK (*sitting up straight with ready sympathy*). What's to do, Martha?

MARTHA. I don't know what Mrs. Munning will say. It's my father, Zack.

ZACK. What's he done?

MARTHA. He's fallen down and broke his arm and he won't be able to wait at the wedding to-morrow.

ZACK. Joe Wrigley's broke his arm! Well, there's carelessness for you.

MARTHA. Yes. Please, he knows it's careless of him and he'll lose the half-a-crown he gets from you for waiting, and we did need that half-crown so bad.

ZACK (*rising*). You'd better see my mother, Martha.

MARTHA. Couldn't you tell her, Zack. She'll be so mad.

ZACK (*shaking head*). It's not a job I'm pining for.

MARTHA. We've done our best. I've brought my father's suit for some one else to wear. And Zack—— (*She puts the clothes on a chair.*)

ZACK. Nay. This is getting too much for me. I'll fetch my mother.

MARTHA. Yes, but Zack——

ZACK. Well?

MARTHA. We did so hope that Mrs. Munning would see her way to paying father all the same.

ZACK. Paying him when he's not there!

MARTHA. He would be if he could. We do need his money that bad.

ZACK. You'll not get owt from mother. Nothing for nothing's her way of seeing things.

MARTHA. There's been so little lately with you having so few parties.

ZACK. You'll get none out of mother. That's a certain fact.

MARTHA (*blubbering*). And I was so looking forward to a bite of meat. We've not seen butcher's meat at our house not for a month and more.

ZACK (*really hit where he's soft*). My word, that's bad, Martha.

MARTHA. And me anæmic too, and never can get food enough to satisfy me.

ZACK. Not food enough !

MARTHA. I'm always hungry, and this did look a chance of getting my teeth into a bit of meat at last.

ZACK. Well, I dunno. That's very bad. (*He looks at coat behind door.*)

MARTHA. You try it and you'd know.

ZACK. Look here, Martha. This'll get me into trouble, but I got a shilling to-day at Ballbrook Farm, and if it's any use to you well—dang it, mother can't kill me. Here it is—— (*He goes to coat, gets shilling, and brings it to her.*)

(*She takes it and expresses thanks, mostly by crying on his shoulder.*)

MARTHA. Oh, Mr. Zack. You are the good one.

ZACK. There ! There ! There ! There ! There ! Don't take on so.

MARTHA. Oh !

(*She kisses him. MRS. MUNNING enters.*)

MRS. MUNNING (*grimly sarcastic*). Oh? When's the wedding, Zack?

ZACK (*humouring her*). Oh, I dunno. In about a month, eh, Martha?

MRS. MUNNING. You're fool enough for anything.

ZACK (*seriously*). I was only consoling her a bit.

MRS. MUNNING. If you want to console young women with your arm around their waists, my lad, you'll not be long for this house. You've enough bad habits now without beginning new ones.

ZACK. Martha was a bit upset, mother.

MRS. MUNNING. It 'ud be a bad case that called for you to set it right. What is it, Martha?

MARTHA. Father's broke his arm and he can't wait tomorrow, and I've brought his clothes, and, please Mrs. Munning, he's very sorry.

MRS. MUNNING. Sorry! Here! Paul! Paul! (*Opens door.*) Paul!

PAUL (*off*). Coming.

MRS. MUNNING. And you consoled her for a thing like that! Console! I'd use a stick and——

(PAUL *enters.*)

PAUL. What is it, mother?

MRS. MUNNING. A nice upset, that's what it is. Joe Wrigley's gone and broke his arm when we wanted him tomorrow.

PAUL (*savagely*). The meddling fool! Disturbing our arrangements. How dare he break his arm?

MARTHA. Please, Mr. Paul, he didn't mean to. It was an accident.

PAUL. Accident! Didn't he know it was Mr. Abbott's wedding to-morrow?

MARTHA. Yes, sir.

PAUL. Then he shouldn't have an accident. You go and tell your father he's engaged by me to-morrow and if he doesn't come and do his job, he'll get no more work from us. You understand?

MARTHA. But father can't wait to-morrow with a broken arm.

PAUL. That's not my fault. I didn't break it. You tell him what I said.

MARTHA (*turning, then*). Then you won't be paying him his money, sir?

PAUL. What!

MRS. MUNNING. Paying him! I like your impudence

ZACK. You'd better go home, Martha.

MARTHA. Yes, Mr. Zack (*Crying*.) But I am so——

ZACK (*his arm about her*). There! There! (*Leading her towards door*.)

MRS. MUNNING. Keep your hands off the girl, Zack.

ZACK. I was only consoling her a bit. (*He opens R. door*.)

MRS. MUNNING. Then don't do it.

ZACK. No, mother.

(*Exit MARTHA*.)

MRS. MUNNING. This is a pretty how do you do.

PAUL. Confound Joe Wrigley. I don't know where to get another man at such short notice.

MRS. MUNNING. And labour scarce, and all. Can you manage it with a man short?

(ZACK *shyly approaches the clothes on chair and, not lifting them, fingers them lovingly*.)

PAUL. No, I can't.

MRS. MUNNING. You'll have to get somebody to-night, then. That's all.

PAUL. If I can. It's going to take some doing to find a steady man.

ZACK. Paul!

PAUL. What's the matter?

ZACK. Could I go?

PAUL. You!

ZACK. I'd dearly love to.

PAUL. You're no use.

ZACK. I know my hands are awkward, but I will try, Paul. I'll try so hard not to break anything.

MRS. MUNNING. He'd be better than nothing, Paul.

PAUL. I doubt it.

ZACK. Give me another chance.

PAUL. I gave you chance on chance. You're more trouble than you're worth.

ZACK. I'm not worth anything, and nobody knows it more than me. But couldn't I go this once, just to fill up? I'll be so careful, Paul.

MRS. MUNNING. It's saving a man's wages for the day.

PAUL. It's not a saving if he makes a mess of things. Our catering's got bad name enough without our making bad to worse. He's got no proper clothes.

ZACK. I'll wear Joe Wrigley's willing. (*He goes to them.*)

PAUL. Joe Wrigley's a big man.

ZACK. Can I try them, Paul? Do let me try them on.

PAUL. Well, you can try, and show us what sort of a lout you look.

ZACK. Oh, hurrah! (*He jerks his coat off and fastens on the clothes.*)

MRS. MUNNING. It's the best road out, Paul.

PAUL. A rotten best.

ZACK (*putting on the dress coat. It is far too large for him*).
It will be splendid to be wearing black again.

PAUL. It's only for to-morrow, mind.

(PAUL *does not yet turn to look at ZACK.*)

MRS. MUNNING. Joe Wrigley's out of it six weeks or more.

PAUL. Joe Wrigley's finished himself with me. Zack can go to-morrow till I've time to look round.

ZACK. Suppose I'm not so bad to-morrow, Paul?

PAUL. Supposing pigs 'ull fly. Let's have a look at you. Good Lord! Hold the trousers to you and let us know the worst. Now, I ask you——

MRS. MUNNING. I can tack the bottoms up, Paul, and the rest is not so bad.

(*Enter VIRGINIA. She has a hat on and her letter in her hand.*)

VIRGINIA. I've finished my—— Oh, Zack, you do look funny.

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

Morning a fortnight later. The SCENE is the refreshment-room attached to MRS. MUNNING'S house. Walls white-washed, roof of glass. Long deal table at the lower end of which PAUL sits writing a letter. Ink and a few papers on the table. In one corner is a quantity of cane-bottomed chairs. Below them, another table. Centre is a knife-cleaning machine, which badly needs oil. Knives on table. At the machine ZACK stands in shirt-sleeves and apron. He is not energetic and turns lazily with many glances towards PAUL. He sees PAUL look at him and his efforts increase for a moment. PAUL seals and stamps envelope and crosses to house door. ZACK, left alone, mops his brow and sits. A low knock at the street door. ZACK rises promptly and opens door with the air of a conspirator. MARTHA WRIGLEY is there.

ZACK. You've just come at the right time.

(MARTHA enters, but stays by door. ZACK hurries behind the chairs and returns with a small newspaper parcel which he gives MARTHA.)

MARTHA. Thank you, Zack.

ZACK (*referring to the parcel*). It's a bit mixed-up on account of me putting bits of things into my pocket at table when nobody's watching, but it's all good food, Martha.

MARTHA. I'm sure I'm very grateful to you, Zack.

ZACK. Well, I often get up famished from my meals, and it's a fight to keep from feeling in my pocket, but I'm managing without.

MARTHA. Yes, and I—— Oh, Zack, I'm grateful. I am, really.

ZACK. I know you are.

MARTHA. Yes, but I want you to know I am, and if anything's going to come to you unpleasant, it's not my fault.

ZACK. Unpleasant?

MARTHA. I'm being driven, Zack. I'd never dream of such a thing myself.

ZACK. What ever is it?

MARTHA. It's father, Zack.

ZACK. Again? What's he broke now?

MARTHA. He's not broke anything, but you know your brother sacked him, and my father says he'll be revenged and——

ZACK. That's a nasty spirit, Martha.

MARTHA. And a nasty thing that Mr. Paul did, and all.

ZACK. I'm not denying that.

MARTHA. And I'd not mind whatever father did to Mr. Paul——

ZACK. Oh, Martha!

MARTHA. I wouldn't. Not for sacking him because he hurt himself. But father's doing it to you and I've to help him to do it, and—oh dear! (*Her handkerchief comes out.*)

ZACK. Don't cry. No, don't do it, Martha, because if you do, I'll have to console you, and you know what mother

said to me the other day. (*He is itching to "console," but restrains himself visibly.*)

MARTHA. But it's——

ZACK. Paul's coming back. Quick, Martha.

MARTHA (*sniffing as she goes*). Oh!

(*ZACK hustles her out c. and returns to his cleaning, not so quickly that PAUL does not see his return. PAUL opens the door and VIRGINIA enters. PAUL follows her in.*)

VIRGINIA. You do look busy, Zack.

PAUL. He's good at looking it. I'd guarantee he hasn't raised his hand while I've been out of the room.

VIRGINIA (*who is obviously quite fond of ZACK*). Oh, but you must be kind to Zack to-day.

PAUL. Why? What's to-day?

VIRGINIA. I knew you didn't know. Do you, Zack?

ZACK (*up to wall, consulting calendar*). Tuesday.

VIRGINIA. It's your birthday and I hope you'll have a very lucky day.

ZACK. My birthday! The twentieth of June. So it is.

(*PAUL returns to his correspondence at the table, half occupied, half listening.*)

VIRGINIA. Yes. I was sure you didn't know.

ZACK. How did you know? Did mother tell you?

VIRGINIA. No.

ZACK. Who did?

VIRGINIA (*with mock impressiveness*). The family Bible, Zack! Your mother lent it me to look at something yesterday, and there I found it. Zachariah Manning, June 20th, 1886. 1886, Zack.

ZACK. Yes.

VIRGINIA. You knew?

ZACK. Yes. That's the year all right.

VIRGINIA. Then how dare you look forty when you're only twenty-nine?

ZACK. Do I?

VIRGINIA. You do, and I'm taking you in hand. Tell me, are your eyes so very bad?

ZACK. They're weak for reading with.

VIRGINIA. You're not always reading. Why do you wear your glasses when you're not?

ZACK. It's a trouble to be taking them off and putting them on.

VIRGINIA. So you keep them on all the time and damage your eyes. Come here, Zack. (*She takes them off and gives them him.*) There! Don't put those on again until you want to read. You look at least five years younger than you did.

ZACK. Do I?

VIRGINIA. You do. And now about the rest?

ZACK. What rest?

VIRGINIA. The other six years that we've got to wipe away. I've got a present for you upstairs to do that.

ZACK. A present!

VIRGINIA. Yes. Don't you usually get presents on your birthday?

PAUL. What! Between grown-ups?

VIRGINIA. Why not? It's just those little pleasant things that keep life sweet.

ZACK. I used to get a bag of humbugs when I was a tiny lad.

VIRGINIA. Oh, we keep on doing it at home and I shall do it here. Only I want a ha'penny from you first,

ZACK. A ha'penny!

VIRGINIA. My present cuts, and so you'll have to pay me for it to keep bad luck away. Ha'penny, please! (*She holds hand out.*)

ZACK (*rather hurt at having to confess*). I haven't got a ha'penny, Jenny.

VIRGINIA. What, have you spent last Saturday's wages already? It's only Tuesday.

ZACK. I don't get any wages.

PAUL. We've given up trusting Zack with money. He lost a shilling on the day you came.

VIRGINIA. Oh dear, then what's to be done? I know. You give Zack the ha'penny for a birthday present. Then he can give it me.

PAUL. What is your present, Jenny?

VIRGINIA. It's a shaving-set.

PAUL. Zack's no use for shaving. He's never shaved in his life.

VIRGINIA. His beard looks that kind of beard. That's why I want him to begin. Give him the ha'penny, Paul.

PAUL. Oh, it'll not matter. Zack isn't superstitious.

VIRGINIA. But I am. All decent-minded women are. And I won't cut my friendship for Zack.

PAUL. Well, if you insist. (*Taking coins from pocket.*) Oh, no good. I've got no change.

VIRGINIA. You've got a sixpence there. That will do. (*She takes it and hands it ZACK.*) There you are, Zack. Now you give it me and I'll get your present from upstairs.

PAUL. But—Jenny—sixpence!

(MRS. MUNNING opens door L. and enters with JAMES ABBOTT, a pleasant gentleman, dressed in good country clothes.

The little episode is suspended. PAUL becomes the shopman with a customer. ZACK stands away and VIRGINIA sits on the pile of wood.)

MRS. MUNNING. Paul.

PAUL. Good morning, Mr. Abbott.

ABBOTT. Good morning, Munning.

MRS. MUNNING. Mr. Abbott's called to settle his account, Paul.

PAUL. Account! You are prompt, sir. I only sent it out last night.

ABBOTT. Any objections to prompt settlement, Munning? (*Paying out notes and gold.*)

PAUL. Not at all. I only wish I could find everybody so quick at paying.

(PAUL writes receipt at table.)

ABBOTT. It's like this, Munning. When I'm satisfied I believe in showing it, and paying promptly is my way of showing that you've pleased me.

MRS. MUNNING. I'm very glad to hear that, Mr. Abbott.

ABBOTT. And I'm glad too, for I don't mind telling you now it's over that I had my doubts. The last once or twice that I've attended weddings where you did the catering I've not been well impressed at all. There's been a harshness, Munning, and when I got married I was in two minds about putting it with you or going to those people over at Norton Parva. Wilson's, isn't it?

PAUL. Yes.

(PAUL comes out with receipt, which ABBOTT takes and pockets.)

ABBOTT. But I decided to support a neighbour and you rewarded me for it. There was a—I don't know how you'd

put it in words—a very pleasant atmosphere. I wanted things to go well.

PAUL. Naturally, sir.

ABBOTT. But I've no complaints at all. It went off with a—a sprightliness. Yes. Sunny's the word.

MRS. MUNNING. Thank you very much, Mr. Abbott.

ABBOTT. But mind you, Mrs. Munning, you don't always do it.

PAUL. I'm sure we try to make no difference.

ABBOTT. You don't always succeed as you did for me. There was a jolly feeling that I'm sure has not been there for some time past. Still, I was pleased, and I've told others I was pleased.

PAUL. Thanks very much. We *have* had more orders in this last fortnight.

ABBOTT. Well, I daresay some of them are due to me. Don't let me down now I've been recommending you. I can get out this way?

ZACK (*opening door*). Yes, Mr. Abbott.

ABBOTT (*ignoring him, to PAUL*). Good-day, Munning.

PAUL and MRS. MUNNING. Good-day, sir.

(*Exit ABBOTT.*)

MRS. MUNNING. Well, here's a change.

PAUL. He's not the first who's talked like that these last few times. But why they do it is a mystery to me.

MRS. MUNNING. I've got a guess. Jenny, you've brought us luck.

VIRGINIA. I?

MRS. MUNNING. It's since you came that things have taken this turn.

VIRGINIA. I'm very glad to hear it, aunt.

MRS. MUNNING. You've been a blessing to us.

PAUL. I think I'll send some more accounts out, mother. They might fetch other people's money in like Mr. Abbott's.

VIRGINIA. Oh yes. I'm in your way here.

MRS. MUNNING. And you're not. You're never in the way.

PAUL. As if I'd mean a thing like that to you, Virginia.

VIRGINIA. But I was just going, aunt. I've something upstairs that I want to bring for Zack.

MRS. MUNNING. Zack?

VIRGINIA. You'd forgotten it's his birthday.

(PAUL sits at the table.)

MRS. MUNNING. No, I hadn't, Jenny. Mothers don't forget a thing like that. But I'd not seen cause to mention it.

VIRGINIA. I'll get Zack's present. *(She opens door.)* By the way, wasn't it at Mr. Abbott's wedding that Zack began to go again?

MRS. MUNNING. I fancy it was.

VIRGINIA. And he's been going to the others since?

MRS. MUNNING. Yes. But he's still on trial. Why, Jenny?

VIRGINIA. I only wondered.

(Exit VIRGINIA.)

PAUL. Get on with your work, Zack.

ZACK. Yes, Paul. *(He turns the handle once or twice, and is then occupied testing the result.)*

MRS. MUNNING. Come here a minute, Paul. You're not that busy.

PAUL. I'm not busy at all. I just made a show of it before Virginia. A good thing she heard him talk like that

MRS. MUNNING. I'll tell you something better for the business than Mr. Abbott's talk.

PAUL. If you'll tell me what it is that makes people say one thing of us one week and change their minds the next, you'll be doing me a good turn.

MRS. MUNNING. I'll do you a better turn. I'd a chat with Virginia in her room last night.

PAUL. I heard your voices going late. You kept me awake.

MRS. MUNNING. Well, it was worth it, Paul. I knew they were well off, but there's more than I thought. The girl's got money of her own besides her mother's.

(ZACK turns the handle.)

PAUL. Some folk get all the luck.

MRS. MUNNING. Well?

PAUL. Well what?

MRS. MUNNING. Don't you take me, Paul?

(ZACK works the machine. MRS. MUNNING turns on him.)

Oh, will you hush your noise, Zack? Get away out of this while I talk to Paul.

ZACK *(going L.)*. Yes, mother.

PAUL. Go round to Bealey's and ask him if those nails have come. Don't be all day.

ZACK. No, Paul. *(He turns to door and goes out.)*

MRS. MUNNING. Look here, Paul, you could do a lot to this business if you had the capital. We could start a temperance hotel and give up the joinery altogether. Zack could clean boots.

PAUL. Aye. If——

MRS. MUNNING. She's got it.

PAUL. Well for her.

MRS. MUNNING. You're not slow to see your interests as a rule.

PAUL. Slow? I'd call it quick myself and very quick. I've known the girl a fortnight.

MRS. MUNNING. Oh, you do see what I'm driving at.

PAUL. I saw it days ago.

MRS. MUNNING. And anything the matter with it?

PAUL. Only Virginia.

MRS. MUNNING. What's wrong with her?

PAUL. She don't show willing.

MRS. MUNNING. Have you asked?

PAUL. Asked? I haven't. It's not a thing to rush at, mother. I've to look at every side before I take a leap like that.

MRS. MUNNING. What are you frightened of?

PAUL. I wouldn't like to get refused. I don't so much as know she thinks of me at all.

MRS. MUNNING. And what do you think I'm doing all these days? I've done nothing else but keep you in her mind. She knows it all from A to Z. Why, only yesterday I gave her the Bible to look at, and you know what's written in the front of it. There's every prize you ever won at school on record with the date and——

PAUL. And what she found in the Bible was that it's Zack's birthday to-day and she's giving him a present.

MRS. MUNNING. Well, she's got a kind heart. I saw her give a beggar sixpence yesterday.

PAUL. That isn't kindness. It's extravagance, and I've no taste for a wife who throws her money away.

MRS. MUNNING. She couldn't throw it if she hadn't got it first. And I'd trust you to let her know that charity begins at home when she's your wife.

PAUL. There's something in that.

MRS. MUNNING. There's all in it. I say we've got a golden chance, and I don't know what you're shirking for. Our luck's well in all round with people talking sensibly about us and the orders coming in.

PAUL. That's not to say Virginia 'ull have me.

MRS. MUNNING. You'll get to know by asking, Paul. And I tell you she's ripe for it.

PAUL. Ripe?

MRS. MUNNING. The girl's in love. She's got the signs of it all over her. It only needs a bit of enterprise from you, and all's as good as done.

PAUL. I've seen no signs of love. She's got a thumping appetite, if that's your meaning.

MRS. MUNNING. Where's your eyes? The girl's another creature since she's been with us.

PAUL. The country air did that. I thought love made them pale.

MRS. MUNNING. Quit talking, Paul. Are you in love with any other girl?

PAUL. What, me in love? I've got more sense.

MRS. MUNNING. Then marry Virginia.

PAUL. All right. I'll try.

(Enter VIRGINIA. She has a small brown-papered parcel.)

VIRGINIA. Oh! is Zack not here?

MRS. MUNNING. He's gone out on an errand. Did you want him?

VIRGINIA. Yes. To give him this. But it will do later.
(*She turns away.*)

MRS. MUNNING. Oh, don't go, Jenny.

VIRGINIA. But Paul's busy here.

MRS. MUNNING. Paul's never too busy to have some time for you. But I've got to see Sally myself, so I'll leave you two together.

(*Exit MRS. MUNNING.*)

PAUL. I'll make you comfortable here. (*He fusses at the chairs and places one for her.*)

VIRGINIA. Oh, please don't trouble, Paul.

PAUL. There's no trouble about it, Jenny. It's always a pleasure to do things for you.

VIRGINIA. Why, Paul, I didn't know.

PAUL. Know what?

VIRGINIA. That you did things for me.

PAUL. You didn't? Well, I haven't boasted up to now.

VIRGINIA. No. Then it's you, and I've been thinking it was Zack.

PAUL. Thought what was Zack?

VIRGINIA. I thought Zack brought the roses that I'm always finding in my room and——

PAUL (*uneasy, but bluffing*). Zack? Did you ever see him doing it?

VIRGINIA. No. And it was you. (*Hand out.*) Paul, I apologize.

PAUL. Apologize? For what? (*He touches her hand.*)

VIRGINIA. I imagined you too businesslike to think of doing anything like that.

PAUL. Well, Jenny, you were wrong that time. I've

got an eye to business, but I'm not quite blind to other things. I've eyes to see the roses coming to your cheeks to match the roses in your room.

VIRGINIA. Yes. I do look better for my stay with you, don't I?

PAUL. It's working wonders, Jenný. The country is the place for you.

VIRGINIA. I shall be sorry to go.

PAUL. Oh, that's too bad. To talk of going.

VIRGINIA. Not yet, of course.

PAUL. And not at all, if I'd my way.

VIRGINIA. Not at all?

PAUL. Are you so set on towns?

VIRGINIA. I live in one.

PAUL. Yes, but I wonder why. It beats me why you and your mother want to live in ugliness with noise and bad air, Jenný. Where's the need for it?

VIRGINIA. Friends. Associations. That's all.

PAUL. You'd never want for friends anywhere.

VIRGINIA. But I've to think of mother. She's like an old tree, firmly rooted and she's hard to move. So we stay where we are.

PAUL. And you'll grow ill again.

VIRGINIA. Oh no. I shall be all right now.

PAUL. You'd be better here.

VIRGINIA. I can't stay here for ever.

PAUL. We might find out a way, Jenný.

VIRGINIA. How?

PAUL. Don't you see? (*Takes her hand.*)

VIRGINIA. Paul! I never thought of this.

PAUL. I've thought of nothing else since I set eyes on you.

VIRGINIA (*withdrawing hand*). But I must think a little now and—and confess.

PAUL. Confess! You mean that in the town——

VIRGINIA. Not in the town, Paul. Here!

PAUL. You don't mean——

VIRGINIA. Yes. I thought I was so clever and could see what you and aunt were blind to. It was just a bad mistake, but I have had Zack in my mind a lot. So much, Paul, that I didn't think of you, or if I did it was as something not quite—— I liked Zack, and I fancied you were wrong to make so little of him. Why, even now, when Mr. Abbott came to say how pleased he'd been and you were puzzled at it all, I thought I'd guessed the cause and put it down to Zack.

PAUL. Well—that's a queer idea.

VIRGINIA. I know it must seem queer to you. I'm sorry I was stupid, Paul. Of course you must know best, living with Zack for all these years. But—isn't it just a little hard to keep him without money?

PAUL. You don't know all the truth. We do. We've had experience of Zack.

VIRGINIA. Yes. I suppose I'm being rash again.

PAUL. I think we've got the size of him, Virginia. He's bone-lazy.

VIRGINIA. Yes.

PAUL. Well, that's Zack. But I was talking of myself—and you.

VIRGINIA. You'll have to give me time for that, please, Paul. I made a false start and I have to see things all over again before I get them right.

PAUL. You're not convinced that Zack's a fool.

VIRGINIA. I have your word now, Paul. But that doesn't quite mean that I—I —

PAUL. That you love me.

VIRGINIA. It doesn't follow, does it, Paul?

PAUL. I hoped it might.

VIRGINIA. Some day, when I'm used to knowing that it's you who've done the little things that made me happy here, it might come, Paul. I cannot say just yet.

(The door c. is burst open violently and JOE WRIGLEY stands in the doorway. Behind him, both very reluctant, are ZACK and MARTHA. JOE is a big man, with his left arm in a sling. He is strong in body and purpose, and has a useful gift of sly humour. He can dominate, and in the ensuing scene, he does. He advances. ZACK closes the door, and he and MARTHA try to look effaced in the background.)

WRIGLEY. Good morning.

PAUL. Wrigley!

WRIGLEY. That's me.

PAUL. Get out of this. There's nothing here for you.

WRIGLEY. I beg to differ, Mr. Paul. We've things to settle here, have you and me.

PAUL. Well, you can't settle them now. I'm busy.

WRIGLEY. I'm not, and so I'll wait your pleasure.

PAUL. I've finished with you, Wrigley.

WRIGLEY. No, you haven't, Mr. Paul. You only think you have.

VIRGINIA. I'd better go, Paul.

PAUL. No. I'll get rid of him.

WRIGLEY. When things are settled, you'll get rid of me. And not before.

PAUL. You're trespassing in here. I tell you to get out.

WRIGLEY. You'll do yourself no good by quarrelling.

It's him I've come about. Him and her. Your Zack and my Martha.

PAUL. Zack? What about him?

WRIGLEY. They've got to be married.

PAUL. What!

VIRGINIA. Oh, how horrid! (*She turns away.*)

ZACK (*following her*). No, no! Please, Virginia! It isn't true.

WRIGLEY (*growling*). What isn't true?

ZACK. I mean you're twisting it.

WRIGLEY. You're going to marry her.

ZACK. Yes. If you say so, but you make it sound so bad the way you're putting it. I mean, you'll make Virginia think that I——

WRIGLEY. And who cares what she thinks?

ZACK. I care, Mr. Wrigley, I do indeed.

WRIGLEY. Oh! Then you're blacker than I took you for. Carrying on with two young women at once.

VIRGINIA. Upon my word!

WRIGLEY. It's he that said he cared, miss. It wasn't me.

PAUL. Let's have this from the beginning, Wrigley.

WRIGLEY. Beginning? I reckon this began when the Lord made him a male and her a female.

PAUL. Oh yes. That's very funny, but——

WRIGLEY. It's not. There's nothing funny in the ways of sex. They've been the worry of the world for ever since the world grew bigger than the Garden of Eden, and if you think they're funny, you've a lot to learn.

PAUL. Wrigley, do you know who you're speaking to?

WRIGLEY. Aye. Brother of my future son-in-law. Makes you a kind of sideways son of mine yourself.

PAUL. We'll have this tale from Zack if you won't tell it straight.

WRIGLEY. I'd rather ; and I'll just be here to know he tells it straight.

(WRIGLEY sits.)

PAUL. Now, Zack. No. Wait a minute. Mother had best be in at this. (*Opening door.*) Mother !

VIRGINIA. And I had better not. (*She follows to door.*)

PAUL. Are you afraid to know the worst of him ? (*Calling.*) Mother !

MRS. MUNNING (*off*). I'm coming, Paul.

VIRGINIA. Oh, Zack, Zack, I am so disappointed in you.

ZACK. I meant no harm, Virginia. It's a thing that's grown from nothing like, and I don't know how it grew so fast.

MRS. MUNNING (*entering*). What is it, Paul ?

PAUL. Zack and Joe Wrigley's girl. Now go on, Zack. What have you done ?

ZACK. I've got to speak it out before you all and with Virginia hearing, too ?

VIRGINIA. I'll go.

PAUL. Why should you ?

VIRGINIA. Because I prefer it, Paul.

(*Exit VIRGINIA.*)

MRS. MUNNING. We're waiting, Zack.

ZACK. Well, there isn't much to tell that you don't know about, mother.

MRS. MUNNING. I !

ZACK. You started the whole thing off.

MRS. MUNNING. When ?

ZACK. You mind that day when Martha came to tell us Joe had broke his arm and Martha took on so in our parlour.

MRS. MUNNING. Well?

ZACK. Well, that's it.

MRS. MUNNING. That!

ZACK. Yes. You came in when I was trying to console her and——

MRS. MUNNING. I caught you kissing her, if that's what you mean.

WRIGLEY. Ah! That's a point. I'd been waiting for that to come.

ZACK. I know I kissed her, but it wasn't a meaning kiss. She was blubbing and she wouldn't hush and so I kissed her like I'd kiss a baby to console it.

WRIGLEY. You kissed her. That's enough.

ZACK. But it weren't for pleasure, Mr. Wrigley. She was too wet.

MRS. MUNNING. He kissed her all right. I saw it. What about it?

WRIGLEY. He's got to marry her. That's all.

MRS. MUNNING. Now what has kissing a girl to do with marriage?

WRIGLEY. A lot. He's going to marry her because you said so.

MRS. MUNNING. I?

ZACK. That's the trouble, mother. You did say something, joking like. You said, "When's the wedding?" and I joked back and said, "About a month," and Martha took it serious and told her father, and he told other people and it's all over the village. It's expected of me now, and I suppose——

MRS. MUNNING. Be quiet, Zack.

ZACK. You told me to tell you.

MRS. MUNNING. Keep your mouth shut when I tell you. You only open it to give yourself away.

WRIGLEY. You needn't trouble, missus. He's done all that.

MRS. MUNNING. Done what? You know he'd no intentions, and he hasn't any now. He's made no promises.

WRIGLEY. He's promised and he's made her presents.

MRS. MUNNING. You'll have to prove that first.

WRIGLEY. Prove? Where's that parcel, Martha?

(MARTHA comes timidly forward with it.)

Open it. See that?

MRS. MUNNING. This? Crusts of bread and bits of meat!

WRIGLEY. That's it. Bread you baked and meat from what you had for dinner yesterday.

MRS. MUNNING. How did you come by this?

ZACK. I saved them from my food. She told me she was always hungry and I felt that sorry for her.

MRS. MUNNING (*giving the parcel to MARTHA*). You're too soft to live. Well, that's only giving charity, Joe Wrigley.

WRIGLEY. With lots of folk it might be, but it's something else than charity when one of your family starts giving things away.

MRS. MUNNING. It's nowt to do with marrying and promising, so what it is.

WRIGLEY. He promised her not half an hour ago in Tim Bealey's shop, with witnesses and all. There was Tim Bealey there and his missus and the errand lad and me.

MRS. MUNNING. Is that true, Zack?

ZACK. I did say something, mother.

MRS. MUNNING. You silly fool!

ZACK. But it was only to save argument. I do hate argument when people have a voice as loud as Joe's.

MRS. MUNNING. That means you forced him, Wrigley.

WRIGLEY. It means he promised before witnesses, and I'll take good care he keeps his word.

MRS. MUNNING. Come here, Martha. Do you want to marry him?

WRIGLEY. Of course she does.

MRS. MUNNING. Let the girl speak for herself.

MARTHA. I'd like to, Mrs. Munning. Only not if Zack don't want as well. I'd not expect it.

WRIGLEY. But I expect it.

PAUL. Yes, Joe, we know it's you we've got to thank for this.

WRIGLEY. I reckon it's me all right. You'll think twice before you sack a man for getting hurt another time. I'll teach you something.

PAUL (*quietly*). Will you? By marrying your girl to Zack?

WRIGLEY. That's it. I'll break your pride.

PAUL. It might break you. I wouldn't swear that this wouldn't make me, Joe.

MARTHA (*up to ZACK*). I didn't go to do it, Zack. I don't want to be no trouble to nobody.

MRS. MUNNING. Do you want her, Zack?

ZACK. I'd rather not say, mother. I wouldn't like to hurt her feelings.

PAUL. Do you want to marry her?

ZACK. I'd rather drown myself.

MARTHA. Oh!

ZACK (*to her*). There, there, Martha. I didn't mean to hurt you. There!

MRS. MUNNING. Keep your great hands to yourself, Zack, can't you?

ZACK. I've hurt her feelings, mother.

MRS. MUNNING. And I'll hurt yours if you don't do what I tell you sharp.

WRIGLEY. Come, Mrs. Munning. What's to do with a chap putting his arm round the girl he's going to marry?

MRS. MUNNING. He's just about the same chance of marrying her as you have of coming back to work here, Joe.

WRIGLEY. I fancy both our chances then.

MRS. MUNNING. You'd lose your money.

WRIGLEY. I think not, Mrs. Munning. I've a notion that you'll weigh things up and come to seeing this my way. I've not come here to quarrel with my relations to be, but I'll just point out that Wilson's of Norton are getting business off you every day and you can't afford a scandal in your line of trade.

MRS. MUNNING. Be careful, Wrigley. Threats of that kind have a nasty name.

WRIGLEY. I'm not afraid of names. Come here, Martha. We've given them enough to think about.

MARTHA. Yes, father.

WRIGLEY. I'll look in later for your answer. (*Opens door.*)

PAUL. You needn't. You can have it now.

MRS. MUNNING. You can. I'll give it you. It's this, that——

PAUL. Zack can go with you now to see the vicar, Joe.

WRIGLEY. Eh?

MRS. MUNNING. What?

ZACK. Paul!

MRS. MUNNING. Paul, are you mad?

ZACK. But I don't want to marry her. I don't indeed.

PAUL. You've made your bed and you'll lie on it. I'll stir no hand to save you.

MRS. MUNNING. But, Paul——

PAUL. I've got my reasons, mother, and they're sound.

ZACK. There's no great hurry, is there, Paul?

PAUL. If a thing's to be done, it's best done quick. We'll have the banns put up on Sunday.

WRIGLEY. You're in a mighty haste. It's giving things a queerish twist to me.

PAUL. When I've to take a dose of physic, I don't play round because it's got a filthy taste. I get it down.

ZACK. But it's my physic, Paul.

PAUL. You'll do as you're told.

MARTHA. I'm sure I'll try to make you a good wife, Zack.

ZACK. If it comes to the worst, I'll try and all. But we might both try and make a mess of it for all we tried. I'm against this, Martha, and it's no good wrapping up the truth. I don't favour it and I can't see sense in it at all.

PAUL. You've gone a bit too far to talk like that, my lad.

ZACK. I wouldn't say I'd gone at all, not knowingly, I mean. It's happened like, somehow, and I'll say this much or brast for it. It'll be the mistake of your life, Martha. I'm not cut out for a husband of yours. If ever you get wed——

PAUL. She's wedding you.

ZACK. Well, I don't favour it. I've as good a right to my opinion as anybody else and I say it's not fair doing to Martha.

WRIGLEY. Is Martha all you're thinking of?

ZACK. There's me as well, and I tell you what I told you down in Bealey's shop. I'm always one to take the short road out of trouble and I'm ready to oblige you. But I don't like it and the more I think about Martha the worse it looks to saddle her with me. Martha's the helpless sort and I'm the helpless sort and you don't make two soft people into strong by wedding them together. She'd try to lean on me and I'd try to lean on her and there'd be nothing there to lean on. It's like trying to make weak tea strong by watering the pot. Martha'll only wed with trouble when she weds a gormless chap like me, and I don't favour it. I see no sense in it at all, and it's no use saying I do, because I don't.

MRS. MUNNING. And I don't see the sense in doing things to please Joe Wrigley.

PAUL. I'm doing this to please myself, not him. What are you waiting for, Wrigley? You've got your answer.

WRIGLEY. I dunno.

PAUL. Then don't wait. If you want to see Mr. Andrews, it's a good time to catch him now before his lunch.

WRIGLEY. Come along.

(WRIGLEY and MARTHA move towards door.)

ZACK. Paul! You're going to have me called in church?

PAUL. It's the usual place.

ZACK. Me and Martha Wrigley! And everybody listening!

PAUL. Take him with you, Joe.

ZACK (*going slowly*). Well, I don't favour it at all. I'll do my best for Martha, but I'm a silly best for any girl. I've got no heart in this.

(MRS. MUNNING goes up towards ZACK. PAUL stops her with a gesture. Exit ZACK, after WRIGLEY and MARTHA.)

MRS. MUNNING (*turning angrily.*) You're crossing me in this. I've not said much so far because there's time to stop it yet.

PAUL. You won't want to stop it, mother.

MRS. MUNNING. Won't I? I'm not particular fond of Zack, but he's my son as much as you, and I've no taste to see a Munning standing up in church with a daughter of Joe Wrigley's.

PAUL. I've just two things to say to that. The first is that you started it with joking about marriage, and the second's what you're planning now for Virginia and me.

MRS. MUNNING. Virginia?

PAUL. I've had that talk with her

MRS. MUNNING. Well? Is it right?

PAUL. It isn't right, and it was very wrong. I've got her coming round. No more than that. But this affair of Zack's chimes in with what we want.

MRS. MUNNING. What's Zack to do with her?

PAUL. That's where the queerness comes. What do you think, mother?

MRS. MUNNING. I'm getting past all thought to-day.

PAUL. She'd him in mind.

MRS. MUNNING. Zack! Well, I don't know! What's Zack been doing that takes her fancy?

PAUL. Did you ever know Zack do anything? Oh, she told me one thing. He's been putting flowers in her room.

MRS. MUNNING. In her room! The impudence.

PAUL. I put those flowers there. You understand?

MRS. MUNNING. *You?* Oh, I see.

PAUL. And I'll tell you something else. She thinks the weddings have got a better name because Zack's going to them now.

MRS. MUNNING. But Zack does nothing but break things when he goes.

PAUL. I'm telling you what she thinks, not what we know. She's got a fancy picture of him in her mind, and while it's there, she'll never marry me. That's why he'll marry Martha.

MRS. MUNNING. I'm not at ease about it, Paul.

PAUL. Whose scheme was it for me to marry Jenny? Mine or yours?

MRS. MUNNING. It's mine, I know.

PAUL. Then you shouldn't scheme if you're not prepared to put things through. I am prepared. I didn't think seriously of this until you set me on. But now I'm on, I'm on, and it'll not be Zack will stop me, neither.

MRS. MUNNING. We'll have to set them up.

PAUL. That won't cost much.

MRS. MUNNING. I'll never bear the sight of Zack living along of Martha in the village here.

PAUL. We might get over that. It's costing something, but there'll be Virginia's money soon, and so——

MRS. MUNNING. What's in your mind?

PAUL. A clean sweep, mother. Getting rid of them. It's much the best. Zack's never any use to us.

MRS. MUNNING. Get rid?

PAUL. We'll emigrate them when they're married.

MRS. MUNNING. You're thinking fast.

PAUL. Leave it to me, mother. I'll arrange it. Yes. It's all plain sailing now. Zack married and in Canada, and me and Jenny here with you. I'll see that steamship agency at Bollington to-morrow and find out the cost.

(ZACK enters.)

What on earth—— ? You've never seen Mr. Andrews in this time ?

ZACK. No.

PAUL. Then what do you mean by coming back ?

ZACK. Well, I wasn't satisfied we were doing right, Paul, and I got a notion as I went along with Joe and Martha.

PAUL. A notion ?

ZACK. I made my mind up I'd consult somebody before it got to doing things so final as the banns.

PAUL. But we've decided.

ZACK. I know you have, but I'm still doubtful, and I thought I'd ask Virginia to tell me what to do.

MRS. MUNNING. Ask Virginia ?

ZACK. Yes. Tell her all about it and just see what she advises me to do. I've a great respect for her opinions.

PAUL. More than you have for ours ?

ZACK. I can't say that until I know what her opinion is.

MRS. MUNNING. She'll be disgusted with you.

PAUL. You'll keep your foolishness to yourself, Zack, do you hear ?

ZACK. I'm hard put to it to see I have been foolish, Paul. Virginia will tell me, I expect.

MRS. MUNNING. Where have you left Joe Wrigley ? At the Vicarage ?

ZACK. No. At the "Bunch of Grapes."

PAUL. The "Bunch of Grapes" ! The crazy fool. Drinking when he'd a job like this to do.

ZACK. I suppose he'd have a drink.

PAUL. Oh, yes, he'd money for that. They've never any money, but there's always some for drink.

ZACK. It wasn't his fault, Paul. I gave it him,

MRS. MUNNING. You! Where did you get money from?

ZACK. I gave him sixpence that Paul gave me this morning for a birthday present.

MRS. MUNNING. Paul gave you sixpence!

PAUL. Yes, I did, as it happens. For a purpose, though. (*Turns on ZACK.*) What gets me is Joe Wrigley's letting loose of you at any price.

ZACK. I gave him an explanation of that. I told him I'd forgotten something important.

PAUL. And he believed you for sixpence?

ZACK. But I *had* forgotten something, Paul.

PAUL. What?

ZACK. Well——

MRS. MUNNING. What's that you're hiding behind you all this time?

ZACK. I'd forgotten these. (*He discloses a small bunch of roses.*) They're wild roses from the hedge and I came back to put them in Virginia's room when she's not there, same as I have done every day, only I'd forgotten them this morning.

MRS. MUNNING. You can just leave off doing it then. Virginia's room! Have you no sense of decency?

ZACK. I'm sure she likes them, mother.

PAUL (*anxiously*). She never told you so?

ZACK. No, but I've seen her smiling at me and——

MRS. MUNNING. She may well smile. Your ways would make a cat laugh.

ZACK. I'll—I'll throw the flowers away. (*He turns towards door.*)

PAUL. Give me those flowers! (*Following him to door.*)

ZACK. But——

PAUL. Go back and get your business done.

(Enter VIRGINIA from the house. She has a small parcel. There is a conflict of wills at the street door. Then ZACK steps into the room again. PAUL closes the door. VIRGINIA notices the flowers. She goes towards PAUL, smiling.)

PAUL. Oh! You've—you've caught me this time.

VIRGINIA. But you needn't look ashamed, Paul.

PAUL. I didn't know I did. I'll—I'll take them away now.

VIRGINIA. That's very sweet of you.

(ZACK watches agape. PAUL goes out with the roses.)

VIRGINIA. Now, Zack, I don't think you deserve it, but I brought your birthday present down, and here it is. A shaving-set.

ZACK. I'm sorry, but I haven't got a coin to give you now for luck.

VIRGINIA. That doesn't matter now.

ZACK. Oh, Jenny!

MRS. MUNNING. I'd think not, too, with you disgraced. Haven't you got a word of thanks for your razor?

ZACK. Yes. It's the best gift you could make me, Jenny.

VIRGINIA. And you promise me you'll use it, Zack?

ZACK. I'll use it right enough. I'll cut my throat with it.

MRS. MUNNING. Zack! He doesn't know what he's saying, Jenny.

ZACK. I do know, and I mean it, too. (*Tearing at paper of the parcel.*)

VIRGINIA (*dryly*). You'd have some trouble, Zack. It's a safety razor.

ZACK. You're all against me, all of you, and I don't care what happens to me.

VIRGINIA. Zack, listen to me. I'm not against you, though I'm very, very sorry for what you've done.

ZACK. I haven't done anything and nobody will let me tell you and——

MRS. MUNNING. Your cousin doesn't want to hear about that, Zack.

ZACK. You're trying to stop her hearing and I'm going to tell her now. She's got it all so wrong. I know I'm not an angel in trousers, but I'm not a wrong 'un neither, and——

MRS. MUNNING. That will do, Zack. You've said enough.

ZACK. You'll none of you be sorry when I'm dead.

VIRGINIA. I should be very sorry, Zack. What is it that you want to tell me?

ZACK. Mother won't let me speak.

VIRGINIA. I'm sure she will. She's leaving us together now, so that you may tell me what you want to say.

MRS. MUNNING. I doubt it's safe for you, Jenny. He's a bit beside himself.

VIRGINIA. It's quite the best way, aunt. To let him open his heart to me. He'll be much better after that.

MRS. MUNNING. He'll tell a pack of lies to get the soft side of you.

VIRGINIA. I'll make all due allowances, aunt, if you will leave me with him now.

MRS. MUNNING. I'm loth to, Jenny.

VIRGINIA. Then Zack and I will take a walk and he shall tell me as we go.

MRS. MUNNING. Oh, if you're keen set like that, I'll go.

VIRGINIA. Thank you, aunt.

MRS. MUNNING (*at door*). But don't you go believing half of what he says.

(*Exit MRS. MUNNING.*)

ZACK. I'm wonderful obliged to you, Jenny. I'll get some good advice now.

VIRGINIA. Sit down and tell me what you want to.

ZACK. I dunno where to begin. It's so mixed up. But I'm not a desperate bad lad, Virginia. I'm really not.

VIRGINIA. No. Begin at the beginning, Zack.

ZACK. It's like this, Jenny. On the day you came, Martha Wrigley came here to let us know her father had broke his arm, and I——

(*The street door opens violently and WRIGLEY enters. Silently he goes to ZACK and points to door.*)

ZACK. I'm busy just now, Joe.

WRIGLEY. Are you coming?

ZACK. But—— Yes, Joe.

VIRGINIA (*stopping ZACK as he goes*). I want Zack, Mr. Wrigley.

WRIGLEY. You can have him when I've done with him.

VIRGINIA. Mr. Wrigley, I ask you as a favour.

WRIGLEY. I'm sorry to disoblige a lady, but my affair comes first.

VIRGINIA. I think not.

ZACK. Let me go with him, Jenny.

VIRGINIA. But, Zack, you were going to tell me——

ZACK. I know. But he'll only argue, and I do hate argument. It wouldn't be any good, Virginia. My luck's dead out.

WRIGLEY (*by door*). Come on.

ZACK. Yes, Joe. Oh, what a birthday!

(WRIGLEY and ZACK *go out*.)

CURTAIN.

ACT III

The parlour as ACT I. The time is seven o'clock on a sunny evening three weeks later. The stage is empty. Then MARTHA opens a door, looks in, enters, comes c., hesitates and sits. She is dressed in her best and looks like a country servant girl on a Sunday evening. She carries a small handbag. SALLY enters from house.

SALLY (*crossing and pulling up short on seeing MARTHA*). Well, I never did see the like of you, Martha Wrigley. Strolling in and sitting you down as if you owned the place.

MARTHA. Are you speaking to me?

SALLY. I'm not addressing my remarks to the table.

MARTHA (*with great hauteur*). I believe I'm speaking to Mrs. Munning's kitchen-maid.

SALLY. Kitchen-maid! I'm a lady-help. And you couldn't get a job at cleaning steps yourself.

MARTHA. I want some of your impudence, my girl.

SALLY. Impudence! From me to you! I've known when you came begging a slice of bread from my lunch when we were at school, and——

MARTHA. Times change, don't they, Sally? I'm sitting in the parlour now, and your place is in the kitchen. You'll keep it, too.

SALLY. You know very well I'm only obliging Mrs. Munning temporarily.

MARTHA. I know you're idling your time in here and if you don't want me to show you up to Mrs. Munning for a dawdling slouch, you'll keep the sweet side of me.

SALLY. You do think you're some one because you're going to marry Zack. It might be Mr. Paul the fuss you make.

MARTHA (*rising*). It's a pity that folk can't control themselves.

SALLY. If that's meant for me, let me tell you I never lost control of myself in my life.

MARTHA. If the cap fits you can put it on.

SALLY. You'll please to tell me what you mean by that, Martha Wrigley.

MARTHA. Everybody knows you'd hopes of Zack yourself. You're only showing your jealousy.

SALLY. Me jealous of you! You'll take that back. Do you hear? You'll take that back.

MARTHA. Not me. It's a well-known fact.

SALLY. Who says?

MARTHA. I say.

SALLY. Then I call you a liar. You're a liar, and a mean, spiteful spitting cat, and——

(MARTHA gives back before her. ZACK enters.)

MARTHA. Zack!

ZACK. Hullo, Martha! I just came in here for a bit of a sit-down. I favour a spell of peace and quiet at the close of the day.

(He just touches MARTHA without affection in passing and sits.)

SALLY. And all day too.

MARTHA. You hold your hush, Sally Teale. Am I to come in here to be insulted by your servant, Zack?

ZACK. Nay, I've got no servant that I ever heard of.

MARTHA. Sally.

ZACK. Eh, Martha, Sally's a decent body. She'd never insult nobody.

MARTHA. Are you going to take her side against me?

ZACK. I've not seen anything to take anybody's side about as yet.

SALLY. She says I'm jealous and she'll take it back.

MARTHA. I won't. As true as true, you are.

SALLY. I'm not.

MARTHA. You are.

SALLY. I'm not. I'm not. I'm not.

(ZACK rises, comes between, puts finger in mouth and whistles.)

SALLY. I'm not.

ZACK. That's enough, lass. Whistle's gone. I'm referee and I look at it like this. You can't both be right.

SALLY. No, I'm——

ZACK. And you can't both be wrong.

MARTHA. She's——

ZACK. So it's a draw.

MARTHA. That doesn't help. She called me a liar.

ZACK *(impressed)*. No. Did you, Sally?

SALLY. Yes, I did. and——

ZACK. I'm sorry to hear that of you, Sally.

SALLY *(contrite)*. Well, she shouldn't have said——

ZACK. Maybe she spoke beyond her meaning. You did, didn't you, Martha?

MARTHA. I spoke hasty.

ZACK (*to SALLY*). And you answered hasty, didn't you?

SALLY. I might.

ZACK. I thought so. Haste! It's the cause of half the trouble in the world. I never hurry. It's a principle with me.

MARTHA (*tearfully*). Zack, I'm sorry I put on airs. I won't do it again. (*Comes to him. He puts arm round her.*)

SALLY. I'll—I'll not lose my temper again, Zack. (*Comes to him. He puts his other arm round her.*)

ZACK. There, there, Martha. There, there, Sally. I never did believe in arguing. It's wear and tear for nothing, and——

(*VIRGINIA and MRS. MUNNING enter, VIRGINIA in light dress, with hat and gloves.*)

VIRGINIA. Oh!

MRS. MUNNING. Going in for being a Mormon, Zack?

ZACK. No, mother. I dunno how it is, cousin Virginia, but the awkwardest things do keep happening to me. I was only reconciling them like.

MRS. MUNNING. You haven't done the bedrooms for the night, Sally.

SALLY. I'm on my way there now.

MRS. MUNNING. You'll arrive a lot sooner if you'll try going upstairs.

(*SALLY is about to reply, thinks better of it and goes out.*)

ZACK. I'm the unluckiest chap alive, Virginia. I'd give the world to have you thinking well of me, and things fall out wrong road every time.

MRS. MUNNING. That'll do, Zack. Martha's waiting to speak to me. What is it, Martha?

MARTHA (*opening her bag*). This is what I came in for,

Mrs. MUNNING. Your invitation to the wedding. Oh!
(*She drops some cards.*)

MRS. MUNNING. Pick them up, Zack.

(*ZACK picks them up.*)

MARTHA. I thought Zack and me might go round to-night delivering them.

(*ZACK, on his knee picking up cards, reverently kisses the hem of VIRGINIA'S skirt.*)

MRS. MUNNING. Oh yes. (*Sharply.*) What are you doing, Zack?

ZACK (*scrambling up*). Picking up cards. (*Giving them to MRS. MUNNING.*)

MRS. MUNNING. Why, you've had cards printed. (*Returns cards to MARTHA.*)

MARTHA. They are stylish, aren't they? (*Giving a card*). That's yours, Mrs. Munning. And I brought you one, Miss Virginia.

VIRGINIA. Thanks.

MRS. MUNNING. Waste of money.

MARTHA. You can't be genteel without spending a bit of money. A wedding's a wedding, Mrs. Munning, and folk have to spread themselves sometimes. Are you ready, Zack?

ZACK. I'm not so anxious, Martha. It'll mean a lot of walking.

MRS. MUNNING. I suppose you'd rather good money went on postage?

ZACK. All right, mother. I'll go. Only you know, Martha, you're tying this knot firm. A printed card's an awful binding thing.

MARTHA. My father's got to see there's no mistake.

ZACK. He's doing pretty well so far.

MARTHA. Yes. My wedding-dress is coming home to-night, too. I'll show it you if you like.

ZACK (*swallowing, then*). I'm like a cat on hot bricks till I see that dress.

(MARTHA and ZACK go out.)

VIRGINIA. Poor Zack!

MRS. MUNNING. Fools pay for their folly. Did you come down for your walk with Paul?

VIRGINIA. Yes. It's about the usual time.

MRS. MUNNING. He'll be late this evening. He'd to go to Bollington this afternoon, but he'll bring you back a fairing, Jenny. He mostly went on your account.

VIRGINIA. On mine?

MRS. MUNNING. Paul's fretting because the roses he's putting in your room each day aren't good enough for you. He's gone to Bollington to see if he can't find better at the flower shop there.

VIRGINIA (*coldly*). He needn't have troubled, aunt.

MRS. MUNNING. Paul doesn't count it trouble to do things for you.

VIRGINIA. So he's told me.

MRS. MUNNING. Well, truth's truth, and I'm not bound to hide it. He's missed his proper bedtime every night with seeking roses here to suit him. They've got to be so fine and large before they'll do for Paul.

(SALLY enters with a vase of very faded roses in her hand.)

SALLY. Do you want these leaving in your room any longer, Miss Virginia? They're that faded and done they'll stink the place out soon.

VIRGINIA. I think they might be thrown away now, Sally.

SALLY. I'd think so, too. Been there a week if it's a minute. Some one used to change them every day, but they've seemingly got tired of the job.

VIRGINIA. Yes. Put them away, please.

(SALLY nods and goes out.)

MRS. MUNNING (*making the best of it*). I didn't know he'd given it up here altogether.

VIRGINIA. I expect he preferred a proper night's rest, aunt.

MRS. MUNNING. Not he. But that's Paul all over. If he can't get the best he'll have none. Look at the engagement ring he gave you.

VIRGINIA. Yes. It's—an engagement ring.

MRS. MUNNING. Ah, but you're like myself, Jenny. You don't value things for their appearance, but for what they mean to you.

VIRGINIA (*doubtfully, fingering the ring*). Yes.

(PAUL enters, with hat and coat on.)

PAUL. Good evening.

MRS. MUNNING. Why, you're sooner than I expected.

PAUL. Well, I've settled it. I've done my business. I've got them, mother. How are you, Jenny? (*Comes round and kisses her.*)

MRS. MUNNING. Have you brought them with you, Paul?

PAUL. I'll show you. Let me get my coat off.

MRS. MUNNING. The roses, I mean.

PAUL (*blankly*). Oh, the roses.

MRS. MUNNING (*quickly*). They'll be sending them, I suppose.

PAUL. Well——

VIRGINIA. I'm just going upstairs.

MRS. MUNNING. You needn't run away from him the moment he comes back.

VIRGINIA. No. But I shan't be going out for a walk to-night, aunt. I'll take my hat off. (*Exit VIRGINIA.*)

MRS. MUNNING. Have you no sense at all? Couldn't you tell her the roses were coming?

PAUL. They're not.

MRS. MUNNING. Not coming? And me just telling her they were all you went to Bollington for!

PAUL. You shouldn't tell her lies. You know they weren't all I went for.

MRS. MUNNING. She liked to think they were. You've got a memory like a sieve.

PAUL. I didn't forget. I went to the shop and asked the price. They wanted sixpence each. Sixpence for a single rose. Have you any idea what a lot of roses it takes to make a decent-looking bunch?

MRS. MUNNING. Will you never get it into your thick head that it's worth spending money to gain money?

PAUL. You've got the spending habit lately. There's no need to spend for the sake of spending. I'm engaged to Virginia. What more do you want?

MRS. MUNNING. I want you to keep engaged till you're married. You're growing careless and neglecting her.

PAUL. Neglecting! I gave her a kiss just now.

MRS. MUNNING. That cost you nothing. What made you stop putting flowers in her room?

PAUL. I'm not marrying a wife to run at her heels with

silly flowers. And there isn't a woman on earth worth buying roses for at sixpence a bloom.

MRS. MUNNING. Virginia's five hundred a year's worth it.

PAUL. It's not. Selling flowers at that price is robbery, and I'll be robbed by no one. Look at Joe Wrigley.

MRS. MUNNING. That won't last long.

PAUL. You're right. It won't. Zack will be married on Wednesday and off to Canada on Saturday. Just let Joe Wrigley come here after that. I'll teach him something.

MRS. MUNNING. You've got their tickets?

PAUL (*showing them*). I told you I had.

MRS. MUNNING. Steerage, I see.

PAUL. Of course they're steerage. Why, do you know we've to give them a matter of ten pounds before they'll let them land?

MRS. MUNNING. Well, we have to start them off with something, Paul.

PAUL. Ten pounds isn't something. It's a thundering lot.

MRS. MUNNING. In a good cause.

PAUL. A good cause is a better cause when it's cheap, and this is coming out a bit expensive.

(*Enter SALLY.*)

MRS. MUNNING. What is it, Sally?

SALLY. The door bell, Mrs. Munning.

(*SALLY crosses and exit.*)

PAUL. An order, if we're lucky.

MRS. MUNNING. Well, you are lucky, lately, aren't you? Everything you can think of's going right.

(*SALLY re-enters.*)

SALLY. It's Mr. Wrigley and some friends.

(WRIGLEY enters with THOMAS MOWATT and HARRY SHOE-BRIDGE. MOWATT is a fat, red-faced dairyman and SHOE-BRIDGE is a farmer, tall, with brown face and mutton-chop whiskers. WRIGLEY has a large jug of ale and puts it on table. (Exit SALLY.)

WRIGLEY. Good evening, Mrs. Munning. Come in, Thomas, Harry. You see, Mrs. Munning, you've been so amazing good to me lately over a bit of supper at nights that I thought I'd bring a friend or two this time to test the vittles.

MRS. MUNNING. You——

WRIGLEY. Ay, and you needn't tire your tongue with welcoming words. I can read your genial thoughts. And knowing you hadn't got it here, we brought our own ale with us. (*Lifting jug.*) It's a real drop of stimulant is this. Now sit down, Thomas. There you are, Harry. (*Places chairs.*) Well, now what shall it be? (*Sits.*) Seeing we're unexpected like, I think a bit of bread and cheese, eh Thomas?

THOMAS. It'll go sweetly with the ale.

WRIGLEY. So it will. Bread and cheese, Mrs. Munning. I'd not say "no" to biscuits myself.

PAUL (*advancing*). Joe Wrigley——

WRIGLEY. Eh, Paul, I didn't just notice you, but you're the man we want. We've really come on business, but we'll get on better when we're fortified with a bite and a sup. You know what Thomas and Harry are, don't you?

PAUL (*surrendering*). You'd better get the bread and cheese out, mother.

(MRS. MUNNING goes reluctantly and opens door.)

MRS. MUNNING. Sally ! Sally !

(Exit MRS. MUNNING.)

WRIGLEY. That's right, Paul. When the Executive Committee of the Little Hulton Savings Club pay a call upon you it's a matter of common sense for you to make them feel at home.

PAUL. Mr. Mowatt and Mr. Shoebridge are on the Executive and they're welcome here, but you——

WRIGLEY. I'm on as well.

HARRY. Since last night.

WRIGLEY. As you say, Harry, since last night. I'm co-opted under rule 17. Cost me a gallon of beer, but I'm co-opted. We're the Executive and we're here on a matter of business concerned with the work of the Society

PAUL (*with deference*). What can I do for you, Mr. Shoebridge ?

HARRY. Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Munning.

(MRS. MUNNING and SALLY enter. *They put food and glasses on table. WRIGLEY pours ale. They eat and drink during the ensuing. Exit SALLY.*)

HARRY. You do the catering for our annual picnic, and there's a resolution standing on our minute book, recommending our members to employ you at times of private merry-making. Thank you, Mrs. Munning.

PAUL. We've done all catering for your members at contract prices for many years.

THOMAS. That's so. And no one likes to break an old connection without warning.

PAUL. Break ?

THOMAS. I reckon first to last you've made a pretty penny by us.

PAUL. I'm sure our charges to you are moderate, Mr. Mowatt.

THOMAS. They'll do. They'll do—so long as you're giving us what we want.

HARRY. It's not the charges that we're here about exactly.

MRS. MUNNING. Then what is it?

HARRY. I'm telling you as fast as I can. This is a tasty bit of cheese, Mrs. Munning.

WRIGLEY. Aye. I thought you'd relish it. It's full-flavoured but it doesn't rasp the tongue. It's mellow.

THOMAS. Meller's a great word, Joe. I like things to be meller. I like meller women and meller cheese and meller ale and meller festivals.

HARRY. Did you go to see Mr. Abbott married the other day?

THOMAS. Did I go? I'd say so. That was a proper meller occasion.

HARRY. It was that. Mellow right through. He married his wife with port wine, did Mr. Abbott.

THOMAS. I'm not partial to port wine myself. I favour ale at all times and all occasions. Ale's a beverage.

WRIGLEY. And Mr. Abbott's wedding isn't the point to-night.

THOMAS. It was a meller wedding and we want things meller always.

HARRY. That's it in a nutshell, Mr. Munning.

PAUL. I'm sure we make no differences, Mr. Shoebridge.

HARRY. Oh yes, you do. You may not know it, but you do. You have two sorts of catering, and our members want the best, or the Executive will pass a resolution advising all to patronize Wilson's of Norton,

MRS. MUNNING. I hope you won't do that, Mr. Shoe-bridge.

HARRY. Well, if you want to keep our connection, you'll have to do the thing our way.

PAUL. But you don't tell us what your way is. What is it we do wrong?

HARRY. I'm coming to it, lad. I'm going to touch the spot. From what we hear, your Zack's a-wedding Martha Wrigley.

PAUL. Yes?

HARRY. Well, I've nowt against it. Martha's doing unexpected well, but if Zack's satisfied I'm sure I am. But Joe Wrigley tells me that it doesn't stop at that, and being her father he ought to know. You want to emigrate them off to Canada. Now where's the sense in that?

PAUL. It seems best to us.

THOMAS. Well, I think it's rotten.

PAUL. You must allow us to be judges.

MRS. MUNNING. I think that's our business and nobody else's.

WRIGLEY (*pushing back chair and rising*). Come on, let's be getting over to Wilson's and making our arrangements with him.

THOMAS (*rising*). Yes, that's the only thing if they're going to talk that road.

PAUL. But I do wish you'd explain. What has Zack's going to Canada to do with it?

HARRY. You want a lot of telling. You have two sorts of jollifications here. Jollifications with Zack Munning and jollifications without. We want them *with*.

MRS. MUNNING. With Zack?

HARRY. He's the difference I've been telling you about.

MRS. MUNNING. Zack is! He never does anything.

HARRY. He does enough. I know what you mean. He's a bit of a fool at doing most things is Zack, but he's got a gift for jollifications. I couldn't point to where it is myself. Zack's just to come and moon about and drop a word into an ear there and take a woman's arm here and the thing's done. You might call it a knack he has.

THOMAS. He mellers things. That's where it is. It's like this, Mrs. Munning. You can eat cheese without supping ale to it, but you don't get satisfaction. And Paul can run a wedding without Zack being there, but it's not hearty—not] what I'd call a jollification. It's stiff and hard. No feeling in it. No mellerness.

HARRY. Zack's got a way with him. He's an artist. If the talk's going flat, or anybody recalls a subject that's not fit to be recalled at a wedding—an old quarrel or such like,—what does Zack do but break a plate? and smiles that smile of his, and all's well in a moment.

MRS. MUNNING. Well, this is a revelation to me. I don't know what to say.

PAUL. I do. He'll go to Canada.

WRIGLEY. Is that your last word?

MRS. MUNNING. No. We'll talk this over, Paul.

PAUL. It's gone too far for talking now. I've bought their tickets.

WRIGLEY. They'll do to light a fire with.

MRS. MUNNING. We'll let you have your answer later, Mr. Shoebridge.

HARRY (*by door*). All right, Mrs. Munning. You're wise enough to know a hasty temper doesn't pay in business. I could give a good guess at your answer.

WRIGLEY. I'm not fond of guessing myself, so I'll stay

here to get it. I'm concerned twice over. As a member of the Executive and as father of the bride to be.

THOMAS. We'll leave it to you, Joe.

WRIGLEY. I reckon you can.

HARRY. Good evening, Mrs. Munning.

MRS. MUNNING. Good evening to you.

(Exeunt THOMAS and HARRY.)

MRS. MUNNING. I suppose we can put this down to you, Joe Wrigley.

WRIGLEY. You might be farther out.

PAUL. You'd nothing to say against emigrating them when I mentioned it.

WRIGLEY. No, but I thought a lot. I'd a father's feelings, and they went too deep for words.

MRS. MUNNING. What have you done this for, Joe?

WRIGLEY. Two reasons, and I don't know which is bigger of the two. Zack's worth good money here. If I'd a mind to ruin your trade I'd let him go, and make you find out what you've missed. But that's not Joseph Wrigley's way. I kill no geese that lay me golden eggs. And reason number two. Aye, and this weighs heaviest. I want the pleasure of knowing they're living in the village here and the satisfaction of watching your face look sour and sourer for the sight of them. I'll teach you something for sacking me.

(VIRGINIA enters, during this speech.)

PAUL. Will you, Joe? You've given me two reasons why you think you will. I'll give you two why you won't.

WRIGLEY. You will?

MRS. MUNNING. Be careful, Paul. *(She puts hand on his arm.)*

PAUL (*shaking her off*). The first's Zack isn't married yet to Martha and the second is he isn't going to be. Their engagement's served my purpose.

VIRGINIA. What was your purpose, Paul?

PAUL. Oh! I didn't see you, Jenny.

WRIGLEY. Never mind her. You're speaking to me. Zack shall marry Martha or I'll make your name a stink in Little Hulton.

PAUL. Get out.

WRIGLEY. You'll eat a lot of dirt for this, Paul Munning. Banns called and wedding fixed and people asked. (*By door, then turns*). Is Zack to marry Martha?

PAUL. He's not.

WRIGLEY. Then the band is going to play and, by George, I'll make you dance to it.

(*Exit WRIGLEY.*)

VIRGINIA (*quietly*). You must tell me what this is, Paul.

PAUL. It's Joe Wrigley making a mistake. Thinks he can bounce me, does he?

MRS. MUNNING. You'd better be careful, Paul. Joe Wrigley's one thing when he's one of our men, but he's another now he's got on that committee.

PAUL. I'd like to wring his neck. The cunning swine.

MRS. MUNNING. Zack's not to go to Canada.

PAUL. All right. He's not. I'll go to Bollington tomorrow and get the money back on the tickets. But he shan't marry Martha either. I'll get even with Joe Wrigley there.

VIRGINIA. What does Zack say?

PAUL. Zack? What's Zack to do with it?

VIRGINIA. It's his marriage, you know.

PAUL. Zack 'll do as he's told. He wasn't marrying her because he wanted to.

VIRGINIA. Why was he marrying?

PAUL. Because I wanted it. I don't want it now.

MRS. MUNNING. We're in a ticklish corner with Joe Wrigley, Paul.

PAUL. Do you want me to hold my hands up to Joe Wrigley?

MRS. MUNNING. You'll take care what you do? I don't want my business damaged worse than it is.

PAUL. *Your business?*

MRS. MUNNING. It is my business, I believe. You're only my manager, and I warn you to be careful or I'll set about making a change. I've learnt something to-night.

VIRGINIA. So have I.

PAUL. Mother, you don't believe Joe's tales of Zack!

MRS. MUNNING. I'd not believe a sacked man's tales of anything, but I believe Mowatt and Shoebridge, and I know who it is they want at the weddings. It's been a shock to me to find they favour Zack, but it's Zack they want and Zack they're going to get.

PAUL. A nice mess he'll make of things.

MRS. MUNNING. That remains to be seen. He's never had his chance till now, but he's just as much my son as you are, Paul.

VIRGINIA. Yes, he was just as much your son when you neglected him and kept him down and gave Paul all your love. And just as much when you and Paul let Zack walk into Wrigley's trap and never raised a hand to save him, and when you schemed to send him out to Canada to save your pride from being hurt, and when you changed your mind about him now—not from regret or any love for Zack,

but when you found your business would do better with him here. Oh, I've been stupid too. I let myself be blinded by the dust you both threw in my eyes, but I'm not blinded now and——

PAUL. Will you be quiet, Virginia?

MRS. MUNNING. If I made a mistake, Jenny, I've owned to it.

VIRGINIA. You've owned to it! Does that make up to Zack for all the years you've slighted him, for the chances that he might have had and Paul has robbed him of? For——

PAUL. Robbed! I think you're forgetting whose ring you're wearing on your finger.

VIRGINIA. Your ring? Yes. There's your ring.

(She takes it off and throws it at him. ZACK and MARTHA enter. MARTHA is in a stupidly elaborate wedding-dress. The ring misses PAUL, hits ZACK and falls.)

ZACK. I think I heard something drop.

VIRGINIA. Yes. I've dropped Paul.

MRS. MUNNING. Jenny!

PAUL. You might have damaged that ring badly. It cost me thirty shillings.

VIRGINIA. You are having an expensive time, lately.

MARTHA *(picking up ring)*. Oh, it's a beautiful ring.

PAUL. Yes. Give it to me.

VIRGINIA. No. Put it on, Martha.

PAUL. What!

VIRGINIA. Put it on.

(MARTHA puts it on.)

Do you like the look of it on your finger?

MARTHA. It's a vision.

VIRGINIA. Is it? Do you like the man that goes with that ring?

PAUL. That's my ring, Virginia.

VIRGINIA. I'm quite aware of that. Do you like Paul, Martha? Will you take Paul Munning for your lawful wedded husband?

ZACK. I'm not very quick at thinking, Virginia, but I think you're getting things mixed up like.

PAUL. She's gone mad.

VIRGINIA. Have I aunt?

MRS. MUNNING. I don't know, Jenny.

VIRGINIA. You do know. You know Joe Wrigley has the power to ruin you unless Martha becomes Mrs. Munning. She's going to become Mrs. Munning, but not Mrs. Zack Munning.

ZACK. But I've passed my word to Martha. We've had banns called in church.

VIRGINIA. Are you in love with Martha, Zack?

ZACK. Well——

VIRGINIA. Are you or are you not?

ZACK. You do ask the awkwardest questions, Virginia.

VIRGINIA. That's good enough for me. Martha, it's a pity to waste that wedding-dress. Would you rather marry Zack or Paul?

MARTHA. I've never dared to lift my eyes as high as Mr. Paul.

VIRGINIA. It's not so high. Stand on a chair if it'll make you feel easier. It's like this, Martha. Paul's missing something by not marrying me, but there's a matter of five hundred pounds that I'll give him in the vestry on his wedding-day with you. Of course if he doesn't marry you there's no five hundred pounds, and there is your father.

MRS. MUNNING. And a new manager for my business too.

PAUL. Mother!

VIRGINIA. So you've got it all three ways, Paul. Martha, you needn't be afraid. Canada with Zack was the riskiest gamble a woman ever thought of, but England with Paul is something solid. You'll have friends to watch you and to watch Paul, too.

PAUL. But—but——

VIRGINIA. That's all right, Paul. You needn't thank me now. And if you'd like to take Martha out for a walk, I shan't prevent you.

MARTHA. Me walk through Little Hulton by the side of Mr. Paul! Oh, Miss Virginia, I'd never have the face.

VIRGINIA. I've told you you're bringing him good money. You give and he takes.

PAUL. Do I take?

VIRGINIA. Don't you?

PAUL. Mother, have you nothing to say?

VIRGINIA. She's come down on the right side of the fence at last, Paul.

MRS. MUNNING. I'll not pretend I'm pleased, but it's a way out.

PAUL. You'd see me sacrificed like this?

MRS. MUNNING. You'll not forget that Martha's in the room, will you?

ZACK. I suppose I'll do wrong thing if I open my mouth, but I'll speak my mind for once and chance it.

VIRGINIA. What's the matter, Zack? You didn't want to marry Martha?

ZACK. I didn't and I did. I've no right to be selfish, and I didn't like the thought of it at first. I'm the wrong sort of husband for her as I am.

VIRGINIA. Very well, then——

ZACK. Aye. As I am I'm wrong, and I know I'm wrong. But I might not be so wrong in Canada. I've never had a chance afore, and this thing's grown on me a bit. I've wanted my chance, and it looked like I was getting it. You never know what a foreign country will do for a man, and Canada began to look a chance to me. I'd hopes of Canada. And now you say I'm not to marry Martha, and I'll never get a chance again.

MARTHA. I'd rather marry Mr. Paul, if he's willing, Zack.

VIRGINIA. He's willing.

ZACK. Maybe you're right, Martha. Paul's a bigger man than me and I mustn't be selfish. But I'd begun to be hopeful, and I own this is a blow to me. I'll go out for a breath of air.

VIRGINIA. Stay where you are, Zack. Paul and Martha are going out together.

PAUL. That's advertising it a bit, and her in her wedding-gown and all.

VIRGINIA. It's meant to advertise it, Paul. There's your hat. Give her your arm now.

MARTHA. Oh, Mr. Paul!

(They go up to door, arm in arm.)

VIRGINIA. And I'll tell you something, Paul. You're great at talking of the cost of things. A pleasant look costs no more than a sour one, so see what you can do.

(Exit PAUL and MARTHA. VIRGINIA closes door.)

Now then, aunt, is there anything you'd like to say to Zack?

MRS. MUNNING. He's the cause of more trouble than he's worth, and has been since the day he was born.

ZACK. Yes, mother. I knew it must be all my fault some road.

VIRGINIA. I suppose that way of speaking to him is force of habit, aunt. But it's time you changed your habits now. Don't you think you'd feel better if you apologized to Zack?

MRS. MUNNING. Apologized!

VIRGINIA. I've a belief myself in paying debts.

MRS. MUNNING. I don't owe Zack for much.

VIRGINIA. Only thirty years' neglect.

ZACK. You mustn't talk like that to mother, Jenny. You can't expect a great soft thing like me to get same care taken of him as she took of Paul. You don't treat cart-horses like you'd treat a racer.

VIRGINIA (*to* MRS. MUNNING, *ignoring* ZACK). So you've nothing to say to him?

MRS. MUNNING. I don't know that I have.

VIRGINIA. You're leaving quite a lot to me.

MRS. MUNNING. We know what's good for Zack. Some folk don't pay for kindness.

VIRGINIA. Some never get a chance. Zack's had your method long enough. We'll try mine now.

MRS. MUNNING. And what is yours?

VIRGINIA. Bring me some hot water and a towel, Zack.

ZACK. Hot water?

VIRGINIA. In a jug.

ZACK. Yes, Jenny. I knew there'd be hot water in it somewhere. (*Exit* ZACK.)

MRS. MUNNING. What's this for?

VIRGINIA. A clean start and a clean chin and Zack's first lesson in the art of self-respect.

MRS. MUNNING. Meaning you're going to swell his head.

VIRGINIA. No, aunt. Only to shave his beard. I'm

going to talk to Zack and a lather-brush will be a handy thing to stop his mouth with if he tries to answer back before I've done.

(ZACK re-enters with steaming jug and a towel.)

ZACK. It's very hot. I found the kettle on the boil.

VIRGINIA. All the better.

ZACK (*apprehensively*). Yes, Jenny.

MRS. MUNNING. And you think I'll stay here and watch you do it?

VIRGINIA. Well, aunt, I rather hoped you wouldn't.

MRS. MUNNING. You're taking charge of things, young lady.

VIRGINIA. I've come to the conclusion that it's time.

(MRS. MUNNING meets her eye, quails and goes out.)

Zack, go upstairs and bring me down the birthday present that I gave you.

ZACK. It's not upstairs, Jenny.

VIRGINIA. Where is it, then? I want it.

ZACK. I keep it in my pocket.

VIRGINIA. No wonder your coat fits like a sack. Give it me.

ZACK. You're not going to take it off me because I didn't use it, are you?

VIRGINIA. I'm going to use it. Sit down. (*She pushes him into chair and puts towel round his neck.*) Tell me why you carried this about with you.

ZACK. It's because I——(*hesitates.*)

VIRGINIA. Well?

ZACK. Because you gave it me.

VIRGINIA. I gave it you for use. Keep still now. (*She trims his beard with scissors.*)

ZACK. Yes, Jenny. I know, but I couldn't bring myself to do it. They're too grand for using on the likes of me. Oh! (*She deliberately pricks him.*)

VIRGINIA. What is it?

ZACK. You ran the scissors into me. It doesn't matter though.

(*She pricks again.*)

Oh, Jenny, that did hurt a bit.

VIRGINIA. I meant it to. Don't you dare to say it doesn't matter when you're hurt or I'll hurt you again.

ZACK. No, Jenny.

(*She turns to table and makes lather.*)

VIRGINIA. And when I give you anything and tell you to use it, you won't imagine it's too grand for you. You'll use it. (*Her back is still turned to him. He fingers the stubble on his chin and nervously holds the chair-arms, watching her timorously.*)

ZACK. Yes, Jenny.

VIRGINIA (*turning with lather-brush*). Very well. Now I can start talking to you. (*She holds brush poised. He eyes it.*)

ZACK. You've not done badly up to now for a non-starter. (*She puts brush in his mouth.*) Oof!

VIRGINIA (*lathering*). If you open your mouth again unless I tell you to, that's what you'll get. Now, Zack Munning, who do you think you are? (*Stands from him.*) You may answer.

ZACK. Well I suppose I'm—I dunno. I'm nobody much.

VIRGINIA (*approaching and lathering*). You can't answer. Then I'll tell you. You are not nobody. You're a person

of considerable importance. For one thing, you're the mainstay of your mother's business. When you go to weddings, they're liked, and when you don't they're disliked. Paul is not popular. You are. You may speak.

ZACK. You've no right to run down Paul like that, Jenny.

VIRGINIA. I'm not running him down. I'm putting him in his place in comparison with you. Now, is that understood? You're of more value here than he is.

ZACK. Oh, but, Jenny—oof! (*He gets the brush in his mouth.*)

VIRGINIA. If you like a mouthful of soap at every word I utter you can have it. If you don't, sit quiet and listen. Where was I coming to? Oh yes. Martha Wrigley. You didn't love her, Zack. Why did you let them force her on to you?

ZACK. I do hate argument, Jenny. Paul argued and Joe argued and he's a powerful voice for arguing has Joe, and so I just said "yes" to make an end of it.

VIRGINIA (*taking razor*). You'd better turn round to the light now. I don't want to plough your face. Carry the chair to the window.

ZACK. Yes, Jenny.

VIRGINIA. Sit down and let me see what I can make of you. (*She shaves.*) You just said "Yes" to save yourself the trouble of saying "No" and never thought of anybody else but Paul and Joe.

ZACK (*moving in protest*). Oh yes, I did, Jenny.

VIRGINIA (*alarmed*). Be careful, Zack. I don't want to cut you.

ZACK. Well, I did think of some one else.

VIRGINIA. Who?

ZACK. I thought of Martha.

VIRGINIA. Never mind Martha.

ZACK. But I must mind her. She looked to me for consolation did Martha, and I don't think Paul's as good at consoling a wench as I am.

VIRGINIA. Oh? So we've found something we're better at than he is, have we?

ZACK. I'm bound to think of Martha's feelings, Jenny.

VIRGINIA. Martha's parading the high street with Paul. Her feelings are all right.

ZACK. My conscience isn't easy about her, Jenny. We've been called in church together and——

VIRGINIA (*holding out razor*). And you can finish shaving by yourself.

ZACK. But I don't know how. I've never used a razor in my life.

(VIRGINIA *puts razor on table*. ZACK *rises, half shaved*.)

VIRGINIA. It's time you learned.

ZACK. You were getting on so well.

VIRGINIA. So were you till you began to talk rubbish about Martha Wrigley. Go and ask her to finish shaving you.

ZACK. Have I said anything to offend you, Jenny?

VIRGINIA. Have you said——? You think a lot about other people, Zack. Do you never think of me?

ZACK. I do that. But it's not the same.

VIRGINIA. The same as what?

ZACK. It's common thinking when I think of them. When I think of you it's something a bit special. It's thinking with my hat off, like going into church. It's Sunday best and I couldn't bring myself to talk of it the same way as I'd talk of them. It's not for talking of at all. It's holy-like. That's why I haven't mentioned it.

VIRGINIA (*takes up razor. ZACK flinches*). Sit down again. I'll finish shaving you.

ZACK. Will you, Jenny? (*He sits.*)

VIRGINIA. Yes. Don't talk or you'll get cut. Now listen, Zack. Martha Wrigley's getting what she wants. She's marrying Paul and she'll be the proudest woman in the place. So you can put her out of mind. If you want to say "good-bye" to her, you can go and say it when I've finished shaving you. Only you'll say it in words. You're a bit too free with your consolations, and I've not shaved you for Martha Wrigley to have the benefit of your virgin chin. You've finished with her, Zack, you understand?

ZACK. Yes, Jenny.

VIRGINIA. Very well. Now you can get up and look at yourself in that glass.

ZACK (*peering into glass in lid of shaving set*). Why, Jenny, I'd not have known myself. Is yon lad me?

VIRGINIA. It's you.

ZACK. Well, I tell you what, Jenny, if I'd met that face in the lane on anybody else but me, I'd have said he wasn't a bad looking chap at all.

VIRGINIA. It's not a face you're meeting in the lane. It's your face.

ZACK. That's the surprising part about it. Why, it's very near worth taking the trouble to shave every day.

VIRGINIA. I'll see you take the trouble.

ZACK. And I'll look like this every day!

VIRGINIA. You will.

ZACK. Well, but if that's so, and I'm free of Martha, why. . . . No. I'm getting ahead too fast.

VIRGINIA. Not you. Take another look at yourself if you're afraid about anything.

ZACK (*looking*). I'm pretty near good-looking enough to chance it. Dang it, I will chance it, and all—No. No. I'm not quite bold enough for that.

VIRGINIA (*holding glass in front of him*). Look again.

ZACK. Well, you can't eat me anyhow. Jenny, I've got a heap of love for you. I've loved you since the day I met you, and I've been the miserablest chap on earth because of what's been happening since. Things always do go wrong with me, and they've been going the wrongest road they could, but, by gum, there's just a chance to put them right this time, and I'll dash at it if I'm hanged for it. Jenny it's the most bowdacious thing to come from me to you, but I'm wrought up to point and I've got to speak or bust. Will you have me, lass?

VIRGINIA. Kiss me, Zack.

ZACK. But—but—do you mean to say you'll—

VIRGINIA. You great baby.

ZACK (*embracing her*). Eh, I could hug you till you broke. Love? Love's the finest state of man. I'm—I'm—No. There aren't words made for this. Its too tremendous big for words. Jenny, it's true? You're not—You're not just playing with me.

VIRGINIA. No. It's true. Oh, Zack!

ZACK. Jenny! (*Kiss.*)

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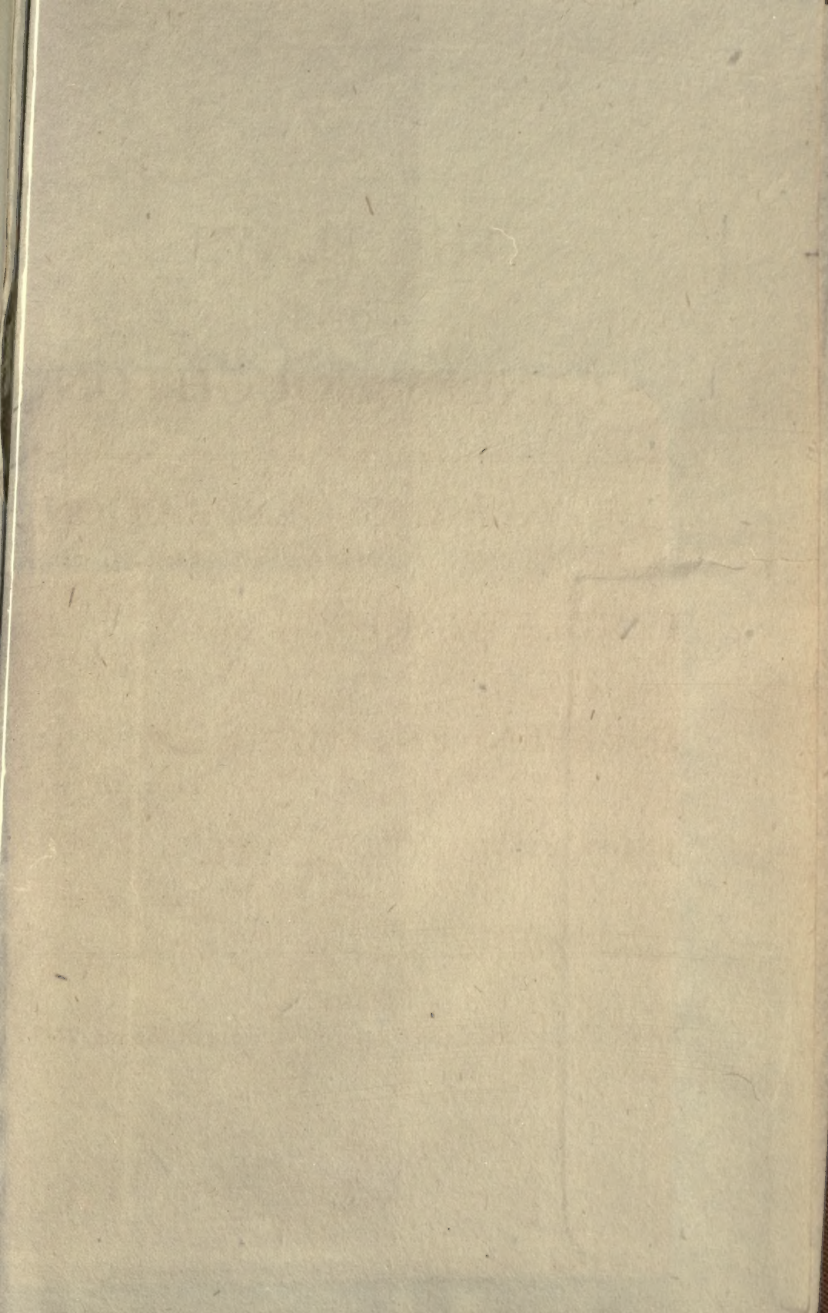
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